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250. £. 150.

LONDON
PRINTED BY SPOTTISWOODE AND CO.
NEW-STREET SQUARE



SPRING AND AUTUMN.

CHAPTER I.

Her bountiful sweet eyes
Looked out full lovingly on all the world.
Oh, tender as the deeps in yonder skies
Their beaming ! but her rosebud lips were curled
With the soft dimple of a musing smile.

* * * * *
A cast of bees, a slowly moving wain,
The scent of bean-flowers wafted up a dell,
Blue pigeons wheeling over fields of grain,
Or bleat of folded lamb, would please her well.

JEAN INGELOW.

DID you really never know a case of people who loved each other tenderly, doing each other irreparable harm ? It is not an uncommon thing : among all the tragedies that this world covers up with decent calm, you may often find it. Let me tell you an instance. As those who suffered have long been consoled by time and death, you need not grieve to hear it. Pity for quite past troubles does us good :

if in no other way, it helps us to forget, for a time, the troubles that fret us now.

It was in a small village in Hampshire, on the borders of the New Forest, that Peter Hatton went to live with his sister Maida, on their return from several years' residence in Germany. His object in life was abstruse study ; hers to make his home delightful, until she left it for one of her own. She was, however, some few years past thirty, and therefore she never allowed any thought of leaving Peter to transpire ; and if other people ever spoke of it as possible, she would gravely discountenance the idea, by saying that nothing could be happier than living in that lovely old place with her favourite brother ; they agreed with each other so exactly, his tastes were so nicely suited to hers ; and, besides, the poor fellow needed all the comfort she could give ;—it was the least she could do to devote her life to him. And then a sigh would intimate more than it was necessary to express ; for all who knew the Hattons knew that Peter had been disappointed in life doubly : a long engagement having been broken off by the sudden death of the lady ; and the shock having caused such disturbance to mind and health, that he was obliged to resign

every professional pursuit—to give up the law, and live on the moderately good income which he already had. But this, which was at first a sacrifice, became in the long run an immunity, and while acquaintance condoled with him on the inactive seclusion to which he seemed condemned, his relations and friends saw that it was precisely the sort of life that suited a book-worm best; and as years went on, it was really difficult to believe there was any longer much amiss with him in any way. He looked entirely well, and even to his sister's penetrating eye it appeared that his grief for a lost love had mellowed to a kind of poetic luxury, and seldom took much effect on his present habits of thought, until he fancied some one was trying to beguile him into another heart affair; in which case he would seem ostentatiously retrospective, and, whenever opportunity offered, speak severely of men or women who could give away their hearts a second time. He did not know it, but he had done the same thing. Ellen Knowles had been loved as much as he could love a woman; and now literature had the concentrated affections of his profound and ardent mind.

Nevertheless, his household was still regulated on the old system, and it was Maida's unchanging creed that Peter's state of health needed every consider-

ation. He preferred a quiet life, being, like many another student, both rather awkward and very shy,—therefore she would not cultivate the society of many neighbours. He found that he could write best in the evening, therefore early dinners must be the rule; and because some seven years ago the doctors had forbidden him tea, it was banished from the breakfast table at Maplehurst still.

Neighbours observed these facts with kindly amusement. Miss Hatton was certainly a very devoted sister, but surely she carried her affectionate solicitude a little too far? (No doubt she did: but who does not like to give her chief pleasure the honours of duty?) She made quite a religion of ‘cossetting’ the rosy-cheeked old bachelor. It was spoiling his temper and making his crotchets ineradicable; whenever he did marry, his wife would have no easy post. Of course no one besides Maida ever believed that he really intended to remain single. And as to Maida herself, seeing her composed demeanour, her quiet eyes and still mouth, with the sad coloured silks she always chose to wear, and the tasteful rarity of her ornaments, one would have supposed that she had taken up the grave honours of middle age with full acceptance; that she felt as we do at the end of a bright summer, when shorten-

ing daylight turns our liking more and more towards the snug comforts of a colder season. But though her life's summer had been tolerably bright and glad, one flower had failed to bloom, had continued in bud, and if years like the present followed one another, might perish of the cold. No one suspected its existence—not even Peter. In his own mind, he dealt with his dear sister's prospects in the summary way that brothers will. ‘Maida,’ he thought, ‘is a regular old maid, and a happy thing for me that she never met with the right person.’ He was mistaken; she had, and in nine hours out of ten she believed herself the right person to him; but intervening doubts often struck a chill across her inner world, and the question then was, do these doubts arise in lucid intervals or the reverse? According to the strength of her convictions upon that point her spirits rose and fell; and as there was now little or nothing in outer life that could affect them, imagination too often tampered with the evidence of memory, and brightened scenes that in the natural course of things were fading from another mind. But Maida was not a woman who allowed herself to be overthrown by inward struggles; she was as active and eager as ever about all her pursuits: drawing, gardening, reading, and music filled up all the long

leisure of her quiet home, and when people who had known her in a less retired circle asked if she was not moped and dull, she could answer truly, that not one day seemed to her too long. But they often felt too lonely.

‘Why not have Isabel to live with us, Peter?’ she said one morning, as she stood by his study-fire folding up some letters they had just received.

‘It would be happier for her, poor little thing, than living with those stupid, pompous Wakemans. They make fuss enough about her, of course, but at seventeen that is not the best thing for a girl; and, from the tone of her letter, one can see how little she enjoys it.’

‘Do you mean you would like her to *live* here?’

‘Yes. Why not? Unless it would disturb you, I should like it extremely. I often want some one to speak to in the long evenings, and when I saw her two years ago at school, I thought her a sweet little creature, so gentle and —’

‘Oh, she would not disturb me, and I should be glad enough to make this out-of-the-way place pleasant to you. My only doubt is whether, with her expectations, it is quite fair to let her live as quietly as we do. And, besides, pretty girls don’t like seeing nobody from one week’s end to another.’

‘Yes, but she is not out yet ; nor has she finished her education, so society is not much of an object; and we have quite enough to cure her of extreme shyness.’

‘Ah, education!—that is another reason against it. We could get no good masters for her short of Southampton—a long way.’

‘Well,’ said Maida, with a good-humoured smile, ‘I believe I was trusting a little to my old laurels, and thinking I could do at least as much as most drawing-masters would in helping her. As to languages, you know that is my *forte*. I should delight to teach her ; and for music, in which I fancy, from what I hear, she already excels me, we could arrange to have that Mr. Jellicoe, who comes every six weeks to the Manor. Come, Peter, what objection have you left now? What can a guardian do better than offer a happy home to an orphan? I am sure we have far more interest in her than Mr. Wakeman, who was not even *first* cousin to her mother.’

Her father was the only brother of the lady to whom Peter had been so long engaged. Losing his wife shortly after the birth of their little girl in India, he sent the child to England, under the care of relations of her mother; but as he had long

known and highly valued Peter Hatton, he asked him to be guardian to his motherless child, in the event of his dying before her majority. Fever took him off when Isabel was only eight years old; and when the aunts who had charge of her both married, she was sent to school. Since that time she had spent her vacations either with one of them or at the Wakemans, where she was now living, but without much attachment to a very uncongenial family. It was in consequence of some girlish lamentation about their tiresome, formal ways, when she came to live with them permanently, that the plan just mooted had occurred to Maida.

After weighing *pros* and *cons* for another ten minutes, she got her brother to write and make the proposal, with this proviso, that unless Isabel really preferred living with them, she should consider it a friendly visit, and leave whenever she liked.

The Wakemans, having several daughters of their own, made no objection, and Isabel was delighted to come.

In answer to some remark of Maida's about getting two rooms ready for her exclusive use, she begged that no long preparations should be made; she was ready to start the very first day Mr. Wakeman should be at liberty to escort her, and

felt sure she should like everything in a real country home.

A few years back Mr. Hatton would have been deeply excited by the mere fact of so near a relation of his poor Ellen's coming to stay at his house ; but on the day that Isabel was expected it chanced that he was trying to reconcile a statement in Lappenburg's 'History of England' with an old Anglo-Saxon chronicle, of which he had lately possessed himself, and all Maida could extract from him when she ventured to suggest a late dinner on Mr. Wakenman's account was a little grunt of impatience, and then an 'Anything you like, so you let me alone.' He relented, however, so far as to go and gather a few spring flowers from the copse below his garden, when, at luncheon time, he heard his sister regretting that the garden hardly supplied enough to fill the flower-table in Isabel's sitting-room, and remembered to have some of the best wines brought up for his other guest.

They arrived at Maplehurst at that time of year when every turn of road in a woody country offers a new picture of spring beauty,—the many-tinted greens varied with cherry-blossom, looking as if its balls of pure white had been thickly strung together, and apple orchards pink with bud. As they entered

the drive, veteran birch trees were swaying pensile branches gemmed with the tiniest new-born leaves, and stalwart chesnuts lifting up their little towers of bloom.

To Isabel, fresh from London squares, it looked like paradise, and she wondered how Maida could have said what she did about dulness in such a lovely place as this.

‘Oh, Mr. Wakeman ! *do* look ! What a bank ! —all over primroses !’

Mr. Wakeman had not even reached the point, so hackneyed in quotation, of the yellow primrose being to him ‘a yellow primrose, and no more.’ It was a spring flower without definite character to a man who not only lived in London, but kept his imagination within its crowded haunts also. He sat beside his young relation looking as severe as the dog on the outside page of *Punch*, musing upon a slight fall in the money-market, and only replied to her ejaculations with a ‘Very fine !’ that convinced her that he was admiring the tall elm trees above. About timber he *could* speak with some interest, and to him the finest tree was but timber.

What he and Mr. Hatton found to say to each other after Maida and Isabel had left the dining-room, it was difficult to imagine. A great deal of

poking and stirring of the fire did duty for Peter, who was still hardly able to tear his thoughts from the time of Ethelwolf; and Mr. Wakeman, having accurately crossed his boots, went on sipping port wine with contemplative appreciation, till at last it struck him that if there *was* any business question to talk over, it must be now discussed, since he intended to return by the earliest train next morning.

‘Your ward is an excitable young creature, Mr. Hatton! Nerves not of the strongest.’

‘She looks delicate.’

‘I need hardly impress upon you and your kind sister the importance of the utmost watchfulness over her health and spirits, at that interesting age.’

‘Oh, you may depend upon us for taking good care of everyone in this house: Maida is a first-rate nurse.’

‘I was thinking more of her future prospects than of bodily health. Young people are dangerously liable to romantic attachments—in the country particularly; and fortune-hunters have a keen scent.’

A pause, during which Peter continued in silence to stroke the tabby cat that sat on his knee, and Mr. Wakeman went on,—‘My dear wife anticipated Miss Crewe’s coming of age with some solicitude. Her own girls, Adeliza and Rose, will not cause so much apprehensive anxiety, though not amiss as to

looks ; but in this case, as you perceive, a relation of her poor mother's feels peculiarly responsible ; and I confess I am not sorry that the young lady prefers placing herself under your roof.'

Nothing more seemed coming, after all these slow announcements, and Peter accordingly tried to close the conference by a rapid summing up :

' Oh, as to that, my sister is a discreet chaperone ; and we don't have company enough to admit many fortune-hunters.'

' Excuse me—the most retired circle has its curate, its young surgeon ; and Miss Crewe is singularly susceptible of influence.'

' Our curate is a married man, with six children ; and our surgeon frequently laid up with gout. Can't tell, I'm sure, about his assistants ; but Isabel shall have a doctor well seen in years, if she ever wants one. Suppose we join the ladies now, if you won't take any more wine.'

The ladies were far away at the bottom of the garden, for Isabel begged to see everything she could that evening—even the cows and ducks ; promising herself still more pleasure when next morning the newly-hatched chicken could be looked at. She was in quiet ecstasies at the beauty of the place—the elegant simplicity of all the indoor arrangements ;

and charmed most of all with Maida's fine intellectual face and winning suavity of manners. In Isabel's judgment she was quite perfect,—such a stately figure, so gently dignified, so very, very kind to her. Of Mr Hatton, with his absent eye and rather slovenly gait, she did not feel quite so sure; he had a beautiful head certainly, but did not carry himself well. Yet how delightful it was, even that first evening, to hear the sort of talk that went on between him and his sister: how much she should learn from living with such clever people, if only they could have patience with her.

Before she slept her first sleep at Maplehurst she had been kissed by Maida, told not to call her Miss Hatton, and assured that she should be loved like a younger sister. Everyone knows how women enter upon a new and delighting friendship. In this instance each had taken the fancy of the other. In almost everything, except the want of some one to love and caress, they were unlike; and in this wide dissimilarity lay the peculiar charm that each found in the other.

Isabel was slightly made, blonde and very fair; with blue eyes of that irregular shape and dovelike downward slant from which mirth and love seem able to look out with greater sweetness than from

any more exact curve. Her features were irregular; it was the high forehead, the long white neck, and bright flaxen curls that fell behind the ears, which gave her pretensions to beauty. At rest her face might have passed unnoticed, but the colour that came and went, and its ever-changeful expressiveness, made it indescribably attractive; besides, she was so childlike in her modest, graceful vivacity, that it was impossible not to make a pet of her.

Peter quickly fell under the spell, and it amused his sister to hear the ingenious excuses he made—to himself, as it were—for thinking it really *best*, and most helpful to his studies, to spend part of every morning for a week after Isabel's arrival in making a flower-bed for her especial use. Maida was so fond of him, and so bewitched with their little guest, that her amusement had no tinge of acrimony in it; neither could she find fault with Peter for conduct so inconsistent with former principles, as she herself was sacrificing all her old routine of daily employment in order to give Isabel three hours a day for Italian and drawing.

CHAPTER II.

Vous avez tant dit, la femme est la compagne de l'homme, que les pauvres femmes vous ont pris au mot, elles sont devenues vos compagnes ; elles ont voulu partager votre existence, vos occupations, vos chagrins ! O folle erreur ! la femme n'est point faite pour partager les peines de l'homme ; non, elle est faite pour le consoler, c'est-à-dire, pour l'en distraire. * * * * Malheur à la femme qui permet à l'homme qu'elle aime de lui confier ces tourmens-là ! Elle perd dès ce moment la faculté d'en distraire, et il la quittera pour aller les oublier auprès de celle qui les ignore. L'amour ne vit que de mystère et de crainte ; la confiance et la sécurité le font mourir.

MME. E. DE GIRARDIN.

‘WHAT a beautiful countenance that is !’ said Isabel, as she stood beside Maida’s writing-table one morning, looking at a crayoned likeness that hung over it.

‘But a very imperfect rendering of Cyril’s real face,—that sailor cousin Peter was telling you about the other day ; at least we call him cousin, because he is the son of a widow our uncle married. I took the likeness partly from memory, for he is never quiet long enough to be a good sitter.’

‘Mr. Hatton seems very fond of him too.’

‘Oh, of course, we both are. When his mother

died, and my uncle married again, and had other children, Cyril was much oftener with us than at his own home. It was nearer the college for one thing.'

'And where does your uncle live?'

'In Scotland. We seldom see him or any of his family, except his sister, my aunt Judith. If you stay with us a year you shall be introduced to her; she always comes once in the course of a year or two to try and do us good. I am sure you never saw any one like her, Isabel.'

'What is she like?'

'Quite indescribable; a complete oddity.'

'I think I would rather see that nice pleasant-faced cousin.'

'Ah, that you would! And we may have him here this summer, for his ship has been out already four years. Look, this is his handwriting; we never burn his letters. They are next best to hearing him talk.'

Isabel liked to see her new friend animated by any subject of conversation that thoroughly interested her, as Maida was for the most part rather unimpassioned in manner, and thus often made the young girl feel at a great distance from her severe wisdom. While they spoke of Cyril and his boyish days, Mr. Hatton came to the door and called his sister

away, leaving Isabel still contemplating the likeness which had at first attracted her attention. There was something peculiarly winning in that manly face—a mixture of sweetness and energy in its expression that can be seldom transferred to paper.

‘How beautifully she draws!’ thought Isabel. ‘Every touch tells. I wonder if she was ever in love with him years ago; not now, of course, at her age. And she speaks so openly of her feelings about him, that it can hardly ever have been more than children’s love grown firm.’

‘How old is your cousin Cyril?’ she asked, when Maida returned a few minutes later; not looking up from her work as she spoke, feeling as if her impertinent thoughts might transpire if she seemed to watch.

‘Thirty-eight—just two years older than I am. But don’t you think we had better go on with ‘Marco Visconti’ now?—it wants only half an hour to twelve.’

At seventeen, thirty seems old, and thirty-six far too old for any of the fancies and feelings which most books attribute to younger women as their especial property; and, on hearing this, Isabel dismissed from her mind the incongruous notion it had for a moment entertained, and glancing at Maida’s

firm and delicate profile, as she took her turn in reading, wondered why she had never married, so many people must have wished to marry her.

In this conjecture she was not mistaken; but her former conclusion had been as erroneous as the judgment of inexperienced youth naturally is. Though Maida was thirty-six, and did express such warm admiration of Cyril, she loved him as she had loved no other.

The habits of youth and middle age are in nothing more unlike than in the matter of expressiveness. The young feel as if the whole world was listening for the least betrayal of *their* shy emotions; the middle-aged have learned that companions are usually far too preoccupied to heed what others feel. They are at once more cautious and more bold than in youth they would have thought it possible to be.

Maida regarded herself as all but engaged to Cyril. It is true he had never asked her to marry him in so many words. How could he before he was full captain, being the poor proud man he was? But he had never scrupled to let her know in every possible way that he thought her the most perfect woman of his acquaintance; he had consulted her in every perplexity of life since the days when, as a

small boy, he had come to Maida's school-room door, with a rueful face, to ask what was to be done about a terrible stain in his white Sunday waistcoat, caused by the half-eaten peach which he had thrust into his pocket when summoned from dessert to say catechism ; and she had got a long imposition from her governess for making a prodigious mess of her frock, her washing-stand, and his waistcoat, in trying to wash out the mark which was sure to cost Cyril a severe paternal reproof.

He often said that he owed to Maida any little learning that stuck in his unlucky head ; and to those who knew him best he would add, that but for one excellent woman religion would have been to him a farce, and not the sheet-anchor it was.

At sea, when he had to give a toast, ‘ Maida Hatton ’ had always been his while a young man ; and now he was no longer boyish, he named her in the society of others less frequently, but in his prayers often. To the ladies with whom he became intimate at foreign stations he delighted to describe her with all the glow that a sailor’s memory gives to home people. If there was a pretty manufacture to be had, a new pattern of work to be copied, it was for Maida he bought, for Maida he borrowed. His little half-sisters were not forgotten, but commoner things

would do for them. For her nothing could be good enough in his estimation.

He was not unsusceptible to the charm of other women. With many he was pleased, with many perhaps he almost flirted; but in his inmost heart Maida's supremacy was seldom, if ever, endangered. She was his ideal of all a woman could be, and he was so proud of her intellectual powers, as well as of her lighter endowments, that to have asked her to promise to be his wife would have seemed to him too great presumption.

For Cyril Rennie was unfeignedly modest, and, in spite of all experience, rated his own advantages at the very lowest valuation.

As years went on, and he still found Maida free on his return to England, and heard from her brother of refusals, he began to entertain the hope that she had perhaps some idea of waiting for him; but yet her manner failed to corroborate that theory: there was so much of an elder sister in it, such good advice given, such an unexcited tone of calm affection, that he was puzzled; and if one day some proof of deep interest made him flush with pleasure (a thing that often happened, for he was vain as well as proud), the next hour would often rob the symptom of all its dear significance, by showing how cold

and imperturbable Maida could be,—how clear it was that she only felt towards him the affection a sister might. He would then have a fit of lofty sullenness for a day or two; and not seeing either tears or agitation on her side, but only a shade more of gravity, a touch of deeper tenderness, come round in keen contrition, and think her still more an angel, because he began to call himself a fool. With all his brilliant qualities, he was wanting in quick perception, and read character through mists of unsuspected prejudice.

This was the state of things when Cyril had last sailed from England. Nothing definite had been worded, but each had felt sure that to the other separation was bitter.

‘I shall come here first when I get back, Maida,’ were his words, as they parted at the last gate.

‘Don’t forget to water my rose-tree, and love old Nelson. God bless you, dearest !’

And though she only pressed his hand, and said not a word, he felt no need of any to tell him why she was still leaning against the gate, when he turned back for another look, with her hand shading her eyes.

Since then their correspondence had been steady in regularity and detail of mutual interests.

Peter, who never liked the interruptions of letter-writing, was glad enough to leave it to Maida, contenting himself now and then with a few lines of postscript on business or political matters. He seldom took the trouble to see what Maida had written when she gave him her letter for the purpose ; but he read every word of Cyril's, of whom he was as proud and fond as quiet landsmen often are of relations who distinguish themselves in active service abroad.

But nothing in the style of his letters struck Peter as symptomatic of more than a long-standing friendship. It was Cyril's romantic nature that prompted so many affectionate reminiscences ; his warm-hearted love of home that accounted for such frequent anticipation of the delight of seeing Maplehurst again. Now and then a turn of expression would appear to Maida so full of deeper feeling that she hesitated about passing on the letter to her brother ; and, as there was no help for it, felt rather conscious while he was reading that side of the sheet. But her uneasiness was unnecessary. Peter would keep it open before him as he went on with his breakfast, and let crumbs of toast drop upon those words of intense meaning as composedly as if it was a newspaper.

‘ What a good-hearted fellow he is ! ’ was his com-

mon remark on such an occasion ; and sometimes he added, ‘I wonder he has kept out of matrimony so long !’—words that jarred painfully on Maida’s mind, as they threw discredit upon her own secret convictions. But like most people who harbour a private construe of facts, she was skilful in turning even Peter’s random shots into favourable evidence, and often thought he knew more than he said, and was playing at ignorance on purpose to draw her out. But Peter was a single-hearted man, and quite incapable of stratagem, unless he was trying to gain a sight of some rare documents in a public library. If he had seen Maida’s letters to Cyril also, he would not have been roused to suspicion : nothing could be kinder or more agreeably *piquante* than they were, but they were guarded : the very liberty that their old position towards each other allowed, made her constantly alive to the least danger of transgressing the limits of womanly reserve ; and if at one moment she wrote with effusion of feeling about her anxieties on his account, alarm lest she had thus betrayed too much chilled the rest of her letter, with an obvious wish to generalize and prevent particular interpretations of its drift.

Now, in nothing is a woman more liable to the errors of fancy than in the judgment she forms of

what will be inferred from her casual admissions. The apprehension that leads her to think what will be thought of her words exaggerates their weight, and thus, for fear of saying too much, she more frequently says too little. Maida's cautious delicacy had this effect on Cyril. As her affection strengthened, it adopted a more impenetrable mask ; he knew little of human nature in the abstract, and, drawing his conclusions from appearance, missed the passion it concealed. And so it came to pass that, with many an impatient sigh, he more and more submitted to the verdict of his reason, that Maida did not care for him in *that* way. And no wonder. How should she wish to marry a poor blockhead like himself?

It is a great misfortune for any woman to be placed in such intimate relations with him she loves that unless her own feelings are concealed they must inevitably bias his. The fear of taking an ungenerous advantage of intimacy doubles all natural diffidence, and often when, longing to win her, he confides to her sympathy every other wish of his heart, she is obliged to misrepresent her own, and, just because he makes her so much a friend, to speak and act as if he could never be anything more.

CHAPTER III.

By fits, moreover, hide them as we may,
It frets us all, this tedious every day;
A longing throb, a germ of bold romance,
Is deep in every bosom ; thirst for chance
And change.

WILLIAM ALLINGHAM.

Blessed are you, whose worthiness gives scope,
Being had, to triumph, being lack'd, to hope.

SHAKSPEARE.

SPRING-TIME at Maplehurst was delightful ; June, with its dog-roses and hay-fields, better still ; sitting out in the long sweet twilights of July, with Maida reading aloud beautiful poetry, very charming ; but when August came, with weeks of chilly rainy weather, Isabel began to know what dulness at Maplehurst might be. The house was so oppressively still ; when the droop-tailed cocks had done crowing at unseasonably late hours in the morning, and the heavy rain-drops ceased to tinkle on the roof of the alcove, Isabel heard nothing for hours together, except the slow jerky dragging along of carts and waggons towards a neighbouring farm,

and the animated yelp of the little terrier dog, when the glittering wares of a travelling tinker came in sight. Nelson, the great Newfoundland dog that Cyril had left behind, was coiled up on his mat at one side of the study door, and would not rouse himself so much as to wink when his gentle play-fellow took hold of his great paw, and begged him to wake up and amuse her.

‘Even the canary is silent now, Maida!’ she would complain when they met at luncheon; ‘it seems to me that all your country world is moulted too! Look, there go the leaves from your favourite lime-tree. How dismal autumn must be!—when one is idle like myself, I mean of course,’ she added, suddenly accusing herself of implied rudeness. ‘I daresay you two never find a day too long, because you are always so busy; but ever since I left you, Maida, I have been looking at the clock.’

‘But, my love, I hoped you were busy too: you said you enjoyed that book of Miss Bremer’s.’

‘So I do—but one can’t go on enjoying a book all day, and I’m *so* tired of being indoors.’

‘I was always afraid of your being moped here,’ said Peter, ‘looking up from a side-table, where he was turning over some dim-looking MSS.,—his luncheon still untouched: ‘we must find out what

the Wakemans are going to do this autumn. Very probably you would like to join their party by the sea-side ; or abroad, if they go.'

' Oh no, dear Mr. Hatton, don't be so cruel—I like being here *so* much. Only just to-day I feel a little tired of the rainy weather. Dear Maida, do not think me ungrateful : I am really very happy—only now and then one cannot help wishing for a little change.'

' Well, if you really care for a long drive in the close carriage, that would be a change ; for I have been putting off a series of calls for weeks—months, I am afraid !'

It was quite enough for the amusement of Isabel. She said truly that a little variety was all she wanted to increase her happiness at Maplehurst. Do not blame young people for restlessness if you mean to be fair in judgment: remember that the attitude of mind in middle age is submissively acquiescent—in youth, eagerly interrogative. The young are restless, in expectation of what life *may* give them ; the old most generally weary and heart-sick with what it *has* given ; and the hopefulness of the one is about as unreasonable as the despondence of the other.

Maida did not share the mood of either age : her

thoughts and wishes were concentrated on a single point—the time of Cyril's return ; and except as they bore upon that long-hoped-for event, outside things had for her an ever-lessening interest. But she loved Isabel dearly, and, with the infallible tact of affection, knew how to invent for her many little diversions in order to break the monotony she had this once complained of.

September brought finer days, and on one of these a letter came from Cyril, announcing his speedy return. It was addressed to Peter, but contained this sentence, ‘ Give dear Maida my best love, and tell her that I mean to be her pupil again if she will have me, and get on with that confounded German while I am on shore.’

Isabel came down to breakfast as Maida was reading it for the sixth time. ‘ He is on his way home, Isabel !’

‘ Who ?—your cousin ? Oh, I’m so glad. I do wish you joy of that indeed. How I like nice things happening on my birthday !’

‘ Ah ! my love, I had only forgotten the birthday since the letters came. See, there are several for you ; many happy returns of the day. I think it would be rather pleasant to be just eighteen. Peter has gone to the greenhouse to gather a

bouquet for you—and to spare his blushes while you admire his present. I did not know he had so much taste left in him ; and if you don't take care, I shall learn to be jealous.'

'Oh, it is beautiful—just the sort of desk I have always admired on your table. How good of you, Mr. Hatton!'—(for he came in as she spoke)—'I shall love it very much both for your sake as well as its own perfections ; and being so like Maida's too !'

' Only much prettier,' said Maida, with a happy laugh. ' Peter likes to believe me superior to all pomps and vanities, to ease his conscience for keeping me at the bottom of a well like this dear Maplehurst.'

' Well, my dear, when Cyril comes we shall be stirred up enough. Let us see how soon can we expect to see him ?—winds being favourable. He wrote from Malta, did he not ?'

While they went into the subject of dates and possibilities, Isabel was rapt in contemplation of divers pretty trinkets which the post had brought from school friends, cousins, and aunts. To her loving nature the letters that accompanied the presents were beautiful and touching : she was young enough to feel all the force of a most affectionate signature doubly underlined ; and had thus little

attention to give to what was said about the sailor. But when she looked up from her letters after breakfast to say, ‘Now, Maida, *your* present will be the first I shall use to-day’ (she had given her a German Bible), ‘and then Mr. Hatton’s, for I have so many thank-yous to write,’ she noticed the glow of beaming gladness which brightened Maida’s countenance.

‘Do so, my darling,’ she replied; ‘and if you want an appropriate psalm to read this morning, pray choose the 107th—I shall be reading it too.’

She did not say more, but stepped quickly into the garden before Isabel could answer, and there tried to spend upon flower seeds and dead roses some of the overflowing energy with which joy had endowed her.

It was a still, damp morning in September; its breathless atmosphere held the complicated scents of mignonette and late roses; only the occasional low whistle of a loitering robin disturbed its sleepy calm. The passion flower was hung with heavy green pods; fruit formed here and there, and only one or two star blossoms were out. The convolvulus, that had tried all the summer to show which was the most lovely colour for its perfect shape to unfold, placed on the brow of this morning a chaplet of intensely purple bloom.

‘Isabel shall wear a wreath of flowers on her soft hair to-day,’ thought Maida. ‘I wish I could think of any suitable amusement for the dear child; at any rate, we will dress up the drawing-room with green sprays and china asters—that is just the sort of thing to please her.’ And she began at once to gather supplies for that purpose. Before she had done, Peter sauntered out from the window door of his study to ask if she had Cyril’s letter in her pocket; he wanted to read it again. The prospect of seeing him had a little unsettled even his studious habits. And Cyril’s letters were not mere transmissions of necessary business; they were almost like presence, without its anxieties; such letters as people take out again in luxurious evening quiet to re-read for their own pleasure; and this was amusing enough to draw many a hearty laugh from Peter, as he sat on a garden-seat near the border where Maida was gathering flowers.

‘What is the joke now?’ she said, quite well knowing, but liking to hear it from her brother’s lips again.

Yet there was certainly no wit in Cyril’s nature; whatever drollery came from either his mouth or pen was the result of an amusing aspect of realities, never from any new combination of ideas. Had his

mind been less limited to matters of fact, he would probably have amused Maida less and understood her far better.

'We shall have time to get the drive-gate and the railings painted before he comes,' Peter remarked, as he once more folded up the letter; 'sailors have such an eye for anything of the sort. I will go and tell Barnes to give an order about that while I remember it.'

Meanwhile Isabel, writing her many letters of acknowledgment, found it made quite a valuable paragraph to say 'Mr. Hatton heard to-day from his cousin Captain Rennie; he is coming here as soon as he reaches England.' In the utter quiet of Maplehurst, she had learned to think the least novelty an event, and of any arrival as important.

Towards dusk, when she was dressing for tea, Maida came to her room and chatted a little time with her in birthday fashion; beginning with gay comments on its being now time for her *début*, and on the necessity of Peter taking them to the next county ball for that purpose, and ending with a few tender solemn words upon the momentous interest of every day and hour in the fresh morning of her life. And then, after placing the wreath of late white roses on Isabel's goldy flaxen hair, she hurried off to

dress, begging her to make tea, if she should be late in coming down. She was, and her brother, as usual, not in the drawing-room till he was sent for. But Isabel was well amused; sitting on the rug beside a ruddy wood fire that alone lit up the room, she busied herself in arranging a wreath of wild convolvulus round Nelson's shaggy neck. The gentle great beast allowed her to play what pranks she would with him, but would not keep his ears still enough for one white blossom to hang over each in the graceful way she wished. Her arm was round his shoulders, and his powerful paws weighing upon her white dress as the door opened, when she heard a gentleman's footstep.

'I am trying to dress up this naughty Nelson, Mr. Hatton, because his master is coming back, and he won't keep——.'

No, he certainly would not and *could* not keep still with his master in the room; for, with one bound that almost threw Isabel over, he reached the door, to which her back had been turned, and the hand of Captain Rennie.

'Down, Nel, down ! Poor fellow ! good dog !' said a deep and flexible voice, which was all that Isabel could now be sure of in the stranger, as the fire had

sunk to sudden blackness, and only a faint glimmer showed that a tall figure had entered.

‘I beg your pardon for intruding, but where *are* my cousins?’

‘You don’t mean that you *are*—Oh! how can you have come! and Nelson and I to see you first! Let me run and call them, Maida will be down in a second. Pray sit down while I call her brother.’

She sped out of the room, and first rushing up to Maida, found that though Peter had actually heard the hall-door shut softly, and the man’s step along the passage, supposing it was some one his sister was seeing on business, he had not stirred till Isabel’s flying footstep up the stairs led him to believe that something unusual was going on.

The incoherent talk and immeasurable hand-shaking that went on between the two gentlemen, no one but Nelson witnessed. Maida had scarcely finished dressing, and the seconds before she could join them seemed long to her, though Isabel had hardly time to do her bidding and run down and light all the candles in the drawing-room before her hand was in Cyril’s, and he indulging himself for once in the good old-fashioned kiss of their earlier years. Then the wondering and questioning recommenced. How

was it? how could it be? Was the ‘Emerald’ in port?

A simple explanation,—his servant had forgotten to post the letter which told them of his approaching return. He had privately sent it on shore by the first boat that came alongside in harbour, and Cyril, not hearing from his cousins on landing at Portsmouth, thought that either something was the matter, or that they had not reckoned on the prosperous gales that had made his passage from the Mediterranean unusually short; he therefore determined to give them a surprise, and ran up for the purpose before the ship was paid off, two days after she reached England.

He fancied Maida’s greetings less warm than of yore. Surprise and heart-beating from excessive emotion had indeed doubled the usual quiet of her manner, and after a few broken words, she felt so trembling in lip and hand that she was glad of the excuse of pouring out tea for withdrawing herself from Cyril’s eager gaze, and listening without the perils of speech.

In ten minutes they were all quietly sitting round the tea-table; and Peter, having his delight heightened by finding that Cyril could wear his evening shoes, suddenly remembered that while

attending to his bodily comforts, neither he nor Maida had thought of introducing him to Isabel.

'Oh, I forgot!' he said; 'you never met my young ward, Miss Crewe.'

'But Nelson told me who *he* was, Mr. Hatton. I do believe the poor dog heard his master's step some time before I did; he was struggling so hard to get away from me.'

'And is the room dressed up in this pretty way for my return, as well as Nelson?' asked Captain Rennie, glancing at the festoons of leaf and berry which Maida had placed over the pictures and pier-glasses.

'No,' Maida replied, smiling, as Cyril fancied, rather ironically; 'it is Isabel's birthday,—our dear little Isabel there, whom you know so well by report.'

'But we should have dressed up the room *quite* as much, even better, had we known you were coming,' added Isabel, feeling that he had annoyed himself by his own question (like other modest and vain natures, apt to go far in both extremes of self-depreciation and self-glory).

His was a face which no one could look at without a wish, more or less energetic, to give him pleasure. Isabel had but furtively examined it, and

yet, by immediate instinct, she knew that he was very susceptible of annoyance ; every movement and accent told her so, and with a true tact she slipped out of the room when tea was over, and took care not to have found her work till she thought the cousins must have had time for a nice long chat by themselves.

CHAPTER IV.

Souvent l'esprit cache le cœur.

MME. DES ECHÉROLLES.

The hidden trains I know, and secret snare of love;
How soon a look will print a thought that never may remove.

LORD SURREY.

CYRIL could not spare more than one day from his captain's duties ; but, before he left, he made out a plan for getting the trio at Maplehurst to come and see his ship before he took leave of it.

A brilliantly joyous day it was ; to Isabel all novelty, to Maida bright with secret happiness. Cyril looked so noble on his own deck. His men seemed so attached to him, and when he took them down to his cabin, she found so many proofs of his romantic affection for every trifling thing she had made or given him, that for one day, at least, doubt was completely silenced.

He charmed her afresh by his kind attention to Isabel ; with just that nice mixture of cordiality and respect which puts a shy girl at her ease, he prevented her from feeling a stranger, while they

talked of old times, and before he escorted them to their hotel, he took from his waistcoat-pocket a little box and begged her to accept a belated birthday present.

‘Only one of the Maltese brooches, which you may have seen, Miss Crewe, already. To tell the exact truth, it was meant for Maida, in the first instance; but I have lots of things for her—an old playfellow’s share—and both she and I would much prefer your having this, if you will do me the pleasure of accepting it.’

In the exquisite courtesy of his tone, as he said this, there was a slight *gêne*; but it arose from Isabel’s blushes, and not from any fear of vexing Maida, who was standing by a pleased witness. The way he spoke of their wishes *as one*, being to her a far dearer gift than any the hand could receive.

‘Take it, dear Isabel,’ she said, detecting a scruple in her manner; ‘and if you do not use it yourself, it will do nicely for fastening flower-chains on the dog’s neck. Oh no, don’t hesitate on my account; I am not jealous, you know.’

She never said a truer word; though with his opposite nature, it had taken Cyril a long time to learn how little she knew of feelings to which he was constitutionally prone. Such chivalrous and jealous

fervour of love as his could only have made a very placid and somewhat phlegmatic woman happy. On a sensitive or nervous temperament it must have taken terrible effect: where so much was given, the return exacted would be painfully exorbitant. But of this he had no idea. Warmth of heart had always led him to believe himself more apt to be victimized than the inflictor of suffering, and to women especially, he never thought it possible that he could cause pain, piquing himself, as he did, on a high-toned gallantry of deportment which made no exceptions of age, or class, or ill looks.

In spite of a very caustic letter from his Aunt Judith about the delay, he spent three weeks at Maplehurst before he went to his father's home in Scotland. Maida prized every hour of his presence, as a miser values gold; but her love for him could not blunt her sense of what was right; perhaps it made her even more quick to perceive his shortcomings in the course of duty than anyone else.

' You know,' she said, ' how much we delight in keeping you. Every day when I wake and think you are here, it feels like fresh good news; but your father is old, Cyril, and we none of us know how long he may live to enjoy having you with him. Really I cannot altogether blame Aunt Judith for writing as she does.'

‘Old vinegar cruet! I wish she would take a cruise to the Red Sea before she meddles with me or my affairs again.’

‘Yes, her way of writing is *very* unpleasant, but I am sure she means more kindly than her words express.’

‘Oh, of course, you defend her. I believe you really enjoy the style of those rigid devotees to unpleasantness, but I *don’t*—quite the contrary, and I’m not going to budge one day sooner for her knagging at me; if you want me out of the house, say so, and I’ll go.’

‘Dear Cyril! you know better.’

‘Then do let me be happy a little while longer, and don’t let us talk of Aunt Judith. Come, one of those detestable declensions of an irregular verb will be quite a pleasant change, if you will let me hammer over it again.’

‘Maida says I ought to go home to my friends, Miss Crewe,’ he said, when Isabel came in half-an-hour later. ‘Isn’t it very hard when I am trying to be a good boy and get on with my learning?’

‘O, *do* stay! No one can want you more than your cousins do.’

‘But, Isabel, his father!’

‘That is another thing, of course: but then I

cannot understand your not wishing,—why that is real home.'

'Ah! Miss Crewe, *all* homes are not homelike. This is the most homish place I have.' He paused, and then added with a little laugh, 'If you had but once heard family prayers at my father's,—every sinner within his range distinctly prayed at—'

'I have known what it is to lose a father,' Cyril, said Maida, still more earnestly than before,—'not as Isabel did before she was old enough to understand what she lost when her parents died,—and I know by bitter heart-wringing experience what anguish it is to remember too late how one *might* have made a father happier. That is why I urge your going, though I believe no one here will be more unwilling to see you go.'

She had been about to use a simpler, stronger phrase, but Isabel fixed her eyes upon her very intently, and voice and style stiffened a little in consequence.

'Yes, *dear* Maida,' exclaimed Isabel, gliding up and giving her a warm kiss on the forehead from behind her chair; 'you understand what real kindness is.'

'And always judge best, too,' said Cyril, in an altered tone; 'look here, to-day is Tuesday—I will

be off to Scotland this day week. You see it won't do to answer old Judith's helm the minute she pulls: there would be no peace whatever if she found she could turn us about like puppets; so it will be really desirable to stay a few days longer.'

'Oh, do!' replied Isabel, in undertone.

'But you talked of being in London a few days, and applying at the Admiralty: when is that to be?' Maida asked.

'Oh, that will do when I have been home. I put *that* off as a motive my father *will* yield to when I want to heave off. No one better appreciates the importance of looking sharp to the main chance.' Both Maida and Isabel were silent, their thoughts very differently occupied, but when Cyril went on with 'So let us enjoy this week *thoroughly*,' the hearts of each were in full agreement. They did all three enjoy those quick-passing days intensely. Peter hardly less so, though nothing could draw him away from his studies many hours together; the fact of Cyril being in the house and sure to make every evening joyous, exhilarated his most thoughtful moods.

In the usually quiet drawing-room there was a tinkle of Maida's piano or Isabel's guitar, a blending of three voices in chatter or song, almost as

soon as the breakfast things were cleared; and Maida would have reproached her pupil for so seldom proposing a German lesson if he had not had the art to beguile her by promising to read aloud some of her favourite poems, if she would give him a holiday only just that week. It sometimes struck her for a moment with unpleasant surprise that he now rarely came up to her morning room, and the thought was immediately answered by remembering that the last autumn he had spent with them, there used not to be a fire in the drawing-room till the afternoon, no other lady being then in the house; so of course when he wanted a lounge he came to her peculiar fireside.

The afternoons now were always spent out of doors; for Peter, in compliance with his cousin's predilections was—as he assured him—risking health by late dinners. In truth, it was his only chance of making sure that Cyril would dine with him, as when once out in the woods, the boy-hearted man could never be convinced that he need make any point of getting home before dusk; and he had been a little chafed when Maida reminded him of the virtue of punctuality. Isabel never did; she only laughed and begged him to shake down one more branch load of acorns, if they *must* turn homewards.

How they all three revelled in their wood walks during that beautiful week of a singularly fine October! For the sailor, every step taken in Nature's calm province was alone a delight, and with Maida (whom he now began to call in his thoughts most often, *dear good Maida*) and her sweet little friend, every pleasure was doubled.

It was on one of the warmest afternoons of 'St. Luke's little summer,' the day before Cyril left, that they went out for a long last ramble, in the New Forest. The wood walks were dry even to dustiness, and the yellow trees above, and yellow fern below, stood in a sort of blind glare of decay. So dry was the ground that it seemed a floor made ready for the dance of the dead leaves with which every path was strewed; but so still the air that these lay unstirred until a rabbit rustled through when advancing footsteps, or a far-off shot, broke the tranced quiet of the scene.

Isabel had been gathering gaudy bramble leaves, as she passed through a thicket, and so engaged, did not at first notice that both her companions had walked on out of sight, but not out of hearing, for she could hear Maida's voice at a somewhat sustained pitch continuing her account of Peter's first journey of discovery to Maplehurst; how it had

been described by advertisement, and how he found the place in reality, and an occasional exclamation from Cyril as he listened. She had heard all that story before, and did not hurry to overtake them; by-and-by they were out of hearing too, and only the light fall of nut or acorn close by disturbed the profound silence of musing Nature. It seemed so softly impressive that she stood still to try and find out what that emphasis of woodland calm was saying to her heart, and as she so stood a firm tread was crunching the acorns that had slipped from her basket unperceived, and Cyril was close by, saying in blythe and tender tones, ‘Isabel! ’

He had turned back as soon as courtesy made it possible. ‘We have left Miss Crewe behind,’ he remarked at the first break in Maida’s narration.

‘Oh, never mind; she knows her way.’

‘No doubt, as well as any wood nymph; but I don’t like giving a lady the slip. I will just run back, and we will be with you in a second.’

It seemed to Maida a wonderfully long second, and as she looked down the narrow alley through which they were at last approaching, she thought they walked very slowly, and smiled at the unnecessary politeness Cyril was showing, in removing with his stick every thorny bramble branch that straggled

across the way. ‘Just like a sailor,’ she said to herself, and to him when they were walking on together, ‘You must not spoil us, dear Cyril, with all your delicate cares; we are too much used to wood walks to wear dresses in them that can spoil.’

One little word in that saying caused him to fall behind both the ladies—the distasteful *us* in Maida’s sentence. What had passed, he thought, between him and Miss Crewe? Only a happy trusting glance; and the common phrase said at a time and in a way that made him feel it uncommon, ‘I wish you were not going to-morrow.’

What had been said? Isabel asked herself at the same moment. Only her name spoken for the first time without the *Miss*, and a something in his manner which words could not be fine and endearing and chivalric enough to express. But Maida went on talking to them both of nothings, as Isabel, giving her half attention, fancied, till they came in sight of a holly tree full of berries.

‘Does not that look like Christmas already? We must remember that tree, Isabel; we shall want a great deal of holly if my aunt Judith spends it with us. She is quite superstitious about having a piece in every room, little or large.’

‘And I’ll help you to put it up,’ cried Cyril,

going up to the tree and beginning to make a notch on the stem with his pocket-knife.

'Do you mean to come for Christmas?' asked Maida with intense satisfaction in her face.

'Yes, Peter said I might.'

'And you knew aunt was coming—you good fellow! Really, Cyril, you are getting quite an exemplary nephew, and if we have got you to help us on with her it will be delightful.'

'Delightful,' echoed Isabel.

'Then you don't mean to spend Christmas with the Wakemans, dear?'

'Oh no, not unless you want my room.'

Talking of pleasant things to do at Christmas, they came out of the forest road into a little village green not far from Maplehurst. A knot of ragged children were clustered round a boy, who had apparently fallen from some height and cut his forehead. As the walking party approached, a sound of crying began, not from the sufferer, but from his two little sisters who knelt beside him, and who, seeing somebody that could pity drawing near, naturally began to feel his case and theirs more piteous. All the questions asked could only draw this much of explanation. Billy had been sitting at the back of an empty cart; the horse had run away,

Billy's eldest brother having fallen asleep with the reins in his hands, and poor Billy had tumbled out ; the grown-up people of the only two cottages near had seen after the horse and the endangered drunken carter, leaving but a faint shout of comfort to the children, to the effect that they must 'look arter the lad till some 'un could be sent from the village.'

'Is there no one in that cottage with the open door yonder?' asked Cyril, while Maida and Isabel were examining the injury.

'No one but old Betty, and she ain't much.'

'Well, but old Betty will be able to give us some water to wash the poor boy's face,' said Maida; and without pausing, she hurried away to the cottage, leaving Cyril supporting the child in a half-sitting posture, and Isabel smoothing back the dusty hair, as if that were an important part of her duty towards *this* neighbour.

An elderly woman came to the door, looking very much like a barrel clothed in blue print, and putting her two hands behind her on the most wooden-looking hips, said she was sure no one could suffer more from 'them accidents' than she did from the rheumatics. But Maida's urgency quickly hurried her into getting a basin of warm water and a bit of rag, though more than this she did not offer to do.

‘How selfish people are!’ thought Maida as she hastened back to the scene of action.

‘Plaster is what we want here,’ said Cyril, looking up; and in an instant Maida had given to Isabel the task of cleansing the wound, and hastened home-wards for the thing required.

It is a curious proof of what human judgment is, that to Cyril, Isabel, holding the poor boy’s hand, and stroking his whitened cheek with caressing tenderness, appeared a more devoted friend to the helpless than Maida, who was plodding along a dusty road alone, as fast as she could, in quest of the requisites for his assistance. The boy had certainly opened his eyes, when one of Isabel’s curls swept over his face, as she stooped to pick up her glove,—had even made an instinctive effort to put his hand to his head, when he heard a lady he never saw before calling him ‘dear boy,’ in order to effect that counter-irritation of scratching by which rustic surprise is relieved; but skilful binding-up of the wound after Maida had put on the plaster, with which before long she returned, really lessened its pain; and he did not miss the little fondling expressions whilst it was being done, which were as natural from Isabel as prompt and silent help was from Maida. Cyril praised her surgical skill aloud; his

admiration of what seemed to him more exquisitely gentle was tacit and profound. For what was great in Maida's character from an ethical point of view marred its heroic elevation from another—the romantic. Strictly just, unswervingly lenient, and self-conscious from an incessant desire to make good outward profession by inward truth, she had little of that generous, *uncalculating* devotedness, none of those noble heats of zeal which are easier to paint as signs of heroism than to live with as elements of peace. Cyril never reasoned on this difference, but he felt it.

But now the parents of the boy came up, and Cyril and his companions were able to return home; ‘An hour after dinner-time!’ said Isabel. ‘No, I put off dinner when I came back,’ Maida replied. ‘I did not think we should be home so soon as this perhaps.’

‘You never forget practical business, dear Maida,’ said Cyril; and the smile with which he said it, was a shade less agreeable than his smiles usually were.

CHAPTER V.

Oh! the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!

R. BROWNING.

For nought's so sad, the whole world o'er,
As much love which has once been more.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

'PERHAPS we are all rather tired with our long walk, and that makes us peevish,' said Maida to herself, when on entering the drawing-room before dinner that same day, she heard Cyril speaking in angry tones, and saw Isabel looking as if she had been chidden and not speaking.

'Oh, of course, if you prefer wearing *Peter's*, he has rights no one would dream of disputing—not I, certainly; I don't care what becomes of mine in the least;' and with that he flung into the fire a brilliant posy of red geranium and china roses.

'Why, Cyril,' said Maida in surprise, 'how destructive, at this time of the year, too! Ah! I see

you want your dinner, and there is the bell ringing, and Peter'—Isabel had not spoken, but she stooped to pick up a bud that had fallen unhurt from the flowers now singeing in the fire. They went into the dining-room, and nothing more passed about them; but afterwards, when Cyril took Isabel's cup of tea to the sofa, where she sat a little apart from the others, she said in rather hurried tones, 'Mr. Hatton had taken great pains to get those noisette roses to go on blowing, for me to wear in my hair, because Maida once said she liked nothing better—I could not help it.' It was not, surely, the words, but the tone of that simple little saying that he thought so well worth remembering for many weeks afterwards.

He left Maplehurst in the afternoon of the next day, taking a late train, so as to perform his long journey chiefly by night. Maida had been slightly disappointed by his proposal to go downstairs, and get one more song from Miss Crewe, when he and she had finished transacting a little final business in her morning-room about a set of shirts and socks that he wished her to order for him against his return. 'If you wish it,' was her answer; and he was almost downstairs before she could follow.

Was it a *little* disappointment? She dared not

tell her own heart. He was always passionately fond of music ; and his adieux were as hearty and as peculiarly affectionate to her as ever ; he scarcely spoke to Isabel, and theirs was the merest ‘good-bye.’

Such were her thoughts as she lingered in the garden alone, after he and Peter had driven off, for Peter would have the last of him, as far as to the station. The drowsy calm of a warm autumn evening was about her ; occasional whiffs of melancholy weed-burning smoke seemed to occupy the damp atmosphere, and not a leaf stirred ; every tree motionless, waiting for the first gale to be despoiled utterly. The dying fires of sunset were still aglow, and seen on smoothed outlines, between masses of loose black cloud ; no such good companions as those clouds for Maida just then ; and though it grew darker and more chilly, she remained out, trying to calm herself by nature’s inexpressible serenity.

The oaks and maples in the adjoining field had still their rich hues of russet brown and pale gold ; but how sere and thin was their foliage ! Her life’s hope had not faded in brightness of tint, but in substance ; in vital tenacity there was a difference which she could no longer hide from herself :—Why had

he not spoken out? How could he seem so cheerful if he believed his limited income made it impossible to speak? To be sure he had one day ejaculated, ‘If I had but got my promotion!’ as they sat together over the fire when Isabel had gone to bed, and she had fancied he was about to say more, and would have said more, if Peter had not joined them; but then there had been many opportunities since. Ah, what a lovely white rim of a moon appeared just then from a break in the black clouds! And it was a crescent moon, too. Long-cherished passion is usually superstitious; for departing from the measures of reason in feeling, it necessarily begins to expect supernatural support; and Maida’s heart was superstitious enough now to accept that moon as a good omen; she had taken leave of common sense.

‘I will feed Nelson, thank you, Isabel; that is always my peculiar office,’ she said rather sharply, when on coming in, she found the young girl contemplating the great dog’s unlesioned appetite—her elbow propped on one knee, and drooping curls, and now and then a tear, falling upon his flagging ears.

‘You are cold, dear Maida! You have been out so long, and I have felt *so* lonely; but after your advice about evening air, I would not come out too.’

There was a fascination in her simple tenderness of manner which always made any irritation shown towards her seem a cruel mistake. It now eased Maida's tightness at heart, and she said in a pleasanter voice, 'I daresay poor Nelson misses his master as much as I do ; and wanted the dinner to console his doggish heart ; so you were quite right not to let him wait to-day.'

'I wish we were consoled as easily,' answered Isabel, and Maida left the room.

The weeks that followed Cyril's departure seemed empty and slow. November that year was quite as sunless and dark as its suicidal repute supposes it usually to be ; and December came in with black frosts and prevailing influenza ; yet Maida never heard Isabel complain of dulness any more. She seemed blythe as a lark ; and if ever a slight seizure of incipient pettishness affected Maida's manner, the sweet-tempered girl had always the art to bring back sunshine. To be at all times charming was her birthright, and therefore she exercised it unconsciously ; if anyone had asked her how it was that she could so often change Maida's mood from grave to gay, she would have said, 'It can be only because I love her so very much that she would not have the heart to grieve me by being

sad.' She was indeed all that Maida loved in girlhood, and Maida all that such a girl is ready to adore in a mature woman. Yet one cheerless afternoon in December, as they sat at their daylight dessert, Maida puzzled her completely, and almost pained. She had just said to Mr. Hatton, 'I want you to teach me to play at draughts before Christmas; will you begin to-day? I told Captain Rennie I would do battle with him then.'

'With great pleasure, my dear—after tea, to-night, if you choose; but surely you would prefer to spend a merrier Christmas than we shall here? You don't know how little difference we make then. And you ought to be seeing more of the gay world now—should she not, Maida?'

'Do not say yes,' cried Isabel, 'and try to send me away; you two, with your cousin, are company enough for me any day.'

'My love, I am not thinking of trying to get rid of you. I quite believe it is as you say, and I hope you will stay with us quite as long as you wish to do so. I don't really know how Peter or I could ever get on without you.'

The feeling she thus tried to render was not so lively as her expressions; in truth it was a *rechauffé* of past feelings, and her words sounded

hollow in her own ears—formal and unfelt to Isabel, who glanced quickly towards her but could not catch her eye ; it was turned to the black leaves of the walnut tree on the lawn opposite, which were still unfallen, flagging to and fro wearily in the keen north wind.

Maida did not look forward to Christmas with unmixed pleasure ; the visit of Aunt Judith was anticipated more as a time of schooling than of holiday ; for she and her niece (no less than thirteen years younger than herself), agreed with each other about as happily as dark blue and violet in colours. Had they not both been such religious women, both so earnest in what they thought right and good, they had agreed better. Miss Rennie might have hoped for a convert in her niece, and Maida admired a saint in her eccentric aunt. As it was they could neither of them refuse each other a certain measure of sincere esteem, a certain amount of such affection as family habits form ; but yet they really felt an ever-rising spirit of antagonism towards each other's peculiar shades of opinion. The very impossibility of wholesale condemnation (nature's first method for relieving dislike), made them mutually more vigilant over slips and inconsistencies than they would otherwise have been.

Miss Rennie was a tall, dark-haired and strong-featured woman of fifty, whose very gait seen at a distance looked uncompromising. Anyone who watched her walk down a street might have seen that she had lost interest in her personal appearance, and fastened it with intense eagerness on her purposes: that if thought of being loved or admired had ever occupied her imagination, it lingered there no longer. Indeed, as she drew nearer one would have been tempted to suspect her of a fierce wish to look as old and as ugly as she could. Nature had done her part towards gratifying it, if it were so—contempt of every softening art much more; and yet with all that there was a pleasant expression of whole-mindedness in her face when she spoke; a clearness from all dissembling and fulness of right intention that made her presence restful—so long as she left you alone. But she liked to describe herself as a person of ‘decided views.’ Now these are seldom professed without words even more trenchant and positive than the opinions they are meant to imply. And when her friends spoke of Miss Rennie as a most excellent and self-denying woman, neither discernment of character, nor gentleness, nor delicacy of tact were included in the virtues for which they valued her. She was a sincerely good woman but unfortunately a very stern one.

CHAPTER VI.

Oh Woman, deeply loving,
Thou hadst not second sight!
The star is very high and bright,
And none can see it moving.
Love looks around, below, above,
Yet all his prophecy is—love !

MRS. BROWNING.

IT was Christmas-eve. Aunt Judith had arrived the day before, and was now at work beside Maida, making a cumbrous flannel petticoat; Peter was reading in his armchair; and Isabel and Captain Rennie, who had been with them ten days already, were playing at draughts on the opposite side of the fire,—he, in his usual buoyant spirits going on chatting disjointedly between his moves; every now and then a quotation, a scrap of an old joke, an exulting outcry, breaking the silence of a player's attention, and Isabel answering with her little low-toned laughs, so expressive of full enjoyment, or with those dove's eyes that could look intensely glad when their long fringe was lifted.

This was what Maida saw as she sat a little apart

watching them, as it were, against her will. An anxious watch. She tried to know how far Cyril was cognizant of his companion's delight at playing with him. 'He is so easily flattered,' she said to herself, 'the child's blushes will quite intoxicate him. Oh no! he is simply merry; there is no feeling in the way he pounced down upon her unguarded point; and Isabel says nothing about his cleverness.' She would have been about as likely to remark to the sun upon its warmth and light. Captain Rennie's influence was by her never analysed; she simply basked in its joy and brightness, and if beside her it was more joyous or more bright, she did not know it. The fatal idea of causation in charms had not yet reached her intellect. Maida's habit of mind was different: at that very minute, I believe if the truth was known, the weak wish was crossing it that *she* was young enough to wear short sleeves and show such a round white arm as Isabel now supported her cheek with.

'My dear Maida,' said her aunt, looking up over her glasses, 'you don't mean to say that you can do that fine embroidery by candle-light?'

'Yes, why not?'

'Well, if you don't value your eyesight, of course it does not matter what you do.'

‘ My eyesight is quite good, thank you.’

And both worked on a few minutes longer.

‘ I see you have not begun caps yet, Maida. *I* don’t, as I consider it a luxury I can still dispense with, but I should have thought you would by this time.’

‘ But why should I?’

‘ People at our age generally do.’

Maida smiled as she answered, ‘ My hair is a little thinner than it once was perhaps, but I do not feel inclined to play the old woman just yet.’

It was something to smile at to hear two such unlike heads spoken of as needing similar treatment; the grizzled black hair that Miss Rennie rolled up in a tight harsh curl on each side of her stringy face would have looked more comfortable capped; Maida’s, fine and abundant, was still untouched with grey. Nothing could have tempted her aunt to this whimsical attack on feminine vanity except the unfailing aptness of human beings to treat other people as they treat themselves. Having mortified her own self-love in every way she could, she wounded that of others with an unerring touch,—not with any malign intention, but by instinct. It seemed as if she felt it to be her especial function to deface any pleasing image of self that her

neighbours might entertain; and one of her most successful means was this of referring to herself and Maida as if of the same age. ‘Women of our time of life,’—‘old maids like ourselves,’ were expressions she frequently used; and if she had had a grain of sympathetic tact she must have felt that Maida winced under them,—in this instance with a positive pang. Though Isabel was just then speaking to her across the room with dancing eyes: ‘Congratulate me, Maida, I *have* conquered this time.’

The worst stings sorrow can give us are, perhaps, in those sudden premonitory forebodings which shoot out like the venomous tongue of serpents from the smoothest forms of present happiness. But Maida forgot that moment of terrible clairvoyance, when Cyril, leaving the draught-board, came and asked her to sing some of the dear old Christmas carols they used to sing together long ago; and she fancied he guessed that in some way their aunt had been making herself vexatious, for when she said, on hearing the carols proposed, ‘I was hoping that you would not give the *whole* evening to unprofitable amusement, Cyril,’ he forgot his courtesy so much as to answer, ‘When do you retire for the night, Aunt Judith?’

‘At the usual time: after family prayers.’

‘Oh, very good. Maida and Peter and I sit up for a little carouse ; we find that extremely profitable ; now, then, Maida, let us begin with that quaint old thing,

God rest you merry gentlemen !

It brings back to mind so much—this day seven years—at the old home of all. Your dear mother,’ he added in a voice only audible to her, ‘sang it with us then : how well I remember her beautiful blind face that evening, and what you wore—the whole scene in its least detail.’

So did Maida ; but now she could not well speak or sing, and gained time by playing *Adeste Fideles* as a prelude. Cyril sat down beside her, his thoughts were busy with the odd surprise that a man feels when he brings the beloved idol of the past into comparison with its unexciting presence at a later time. He thought of his feelings about Maida then as boyish, ‘she was enough to turn the head of any young fellow,’ he said in his own mind ; ‘how graceful and commanding still ! but surely she has aged wonderfully during the last few years ! I never noticed those lines on her forehead before.’

They sang together, Peter joining in occasionally.

It was enough for Isabel to listen, sitting on the rug with her arm round Nelson's neck; and not all Miss Rennie's keen glances, suggestive of reprobation for such idleness, could move her.

Long after twelve, when Isabel had gone to her room, and Peter began his round of nightly inspection, Maida and Cyril sat beside the dying fire; they had turned from talk about old times to consultation as to the future: what should he do with the new year? How act with an eye to getting his promotion? should he go up to London and apply for a ship, &c. &c.? As usual he confided to Maida all his difficulties, and as usual she was an unwearied listener; a wise and patient adviser; first letting him have out his regular sputter of complaint about professional grievances, and then trying to suggest every possible remedy.

The conversation ended as it began—‘But, Maida, as soon as ever I am full captain!’

‘Well, what would you do then?’

She was trying to light a spill in almost extinct embers, and neither of them could see the face of the other.

‘Oh, never mind now!’ he said, as the tardy light suddenly flashed up the paper. ‘Good night, and God bless you.’

If she had remained in the room, unseen, five minutes longer, she would not have gone upstairs with that blinded blissful heart, which so reluctantly yielded itself to the duller dreams of sleep. Cyril took out some old letters from his pocket to refer to one on the business of which he had just been speaking to Maida ; slipped into its cover by accident was her last note, telling him at what hour she should send the carriage to meet him. It contained nothing besides this, and a kind expression of welcome, and he threw it into the fire together with several others of equal non-importance. It was seemingly a little thing to burn an old note, but it meant a great deal; for it was the first of hers he had ever destroyed. His great desk was full of bundles of letters in her beautifully firm and light hand-writing. And at the time of this first proof of sanity—as he called it—there was carefully folded in the pocket of his note-book a tiny scrap of paper, on which Isabel had scrawled a few couplets of verse when they were playing at *bouts rimés* the night before.

CHAPTER VII.

She reads, converses, studies for applause;
And therefore all that she desires to know
Is just as much as she can fairly show.

CRABBE.

La véritable valeur reste, mais l'amour est plus épris de
ce qu'il donne que de ce qu'il trouve.

MADAME DE STAËL.

A **VERY** slight incident opened Maida's eyes. One dinner invitation during Christmas-time the recluse of Maplehurst found it impossible to decline for himself and his home party. It was at the house of a Sir Robert Veyse, lately come to live about seven miles off, whose only daughter had been one of Isabel's youngest school friends, and who now gave her parents no rest till communications were opened with Maplehurst.

She was a merry little brunette; pretty and good-natured, but in Maida's secret judgment one of the most commonplace girls that could be found. She had, however, the good taste to admire Isabel extremely; in school-girl phrase, to dote

upon her; and the Hattons could not refuse their young guest the only neighbours in whom she took much interest. But the Veyses were in almost every respect uncongenial to them; very much ruled by the world's authority, very fond of gaiety and show—and as to literature, worse than totally ignorant. Lady Veyse professed to like books and booky people; and as a fashionable ornament she did like them. She was sure to have on her table all the best books of the season, and might be heard to enquire for expected publications at her bookseller's as eagerly as if she enjoyed reading them when obtained; but talking of them, when she had read long enough to talk pretty well, was what she enjoyed. A book of the year before last, however meritorious, could not win her notice, unless, indeed, some one whose opinion was worth quoting in her little world of acquaintance had spoken with surprise of her not knowing its excellency.

Sir Robert, knighted very recently for civic merit, found quite enough to do in establishing such perfection of cellar and stables as could command a certain style of social respect; he left more intellectual concerns to his wife, and had far too much good sense to betray how little he knew of

books by offering any opinions upon them. His only crime in Peter's eyes was that he would sometimes nonplus him by asking if he knew '*Cœlebs in search of a Wife*'? It was in the library, if he cared to see it. But for such mild solecisms as this he was quite clever enough for general society, a pleasingly placid background to his wife's anxious vivacity; and together with their pretty high-spirited little daughter, made his house a good one to *dine* at. So Peter observed, leaving a long stress on *dine*, as they drove up to it.

'Miss Crewe seems to have a very devoted cavalier in Captain Rennie,' said Lady Veyse to Maida towards the end of that evening, as they sat together on a sofa.

'Sailors are usually very gallant,' was the smiling answer; not quite the same that she gave to herself, as she watched Cyril's continued attention to the happy girl—just then unusually animated by the conversation of Caroline Veyse. That one observation marked the day for Maida; she began to question whether the outer world could see in Cyril's manner more than she had herself discovered—whether her own feelings were blinding her now. And even while she set herself with unflinching determination to examine all the evidence of memory,

her judgment was biassed by Cyril's saying when they came in, 'I dare not come to your side of the room, May, for fear of having my stupidity caught up by that terrible woman beside you : she was at me before dinner, "seeking information," as she said, about Singapore. I wish there were mental almshouses for people who bore one for statistical facts—places where they could go and be answered *seriatim*.' She was so unable to suspect him of anything more than surface flirtation that, seeing Isabel's bouquet in his hands, absently plucked to pieces as he spoke—looked to her as if there could be nothing in it. But she felt fretted, nevertheless, and a remark of her mother's came to mind unsought: 'You must not expect such attentions from Cyril always, dearest Maida ; you are too nearly the same age.'

How she had laughed when she first heard that warning six years ago ! She could not quite tell why, but ever since Isabel had been with them she had felt twenty years older. Several quite new sensations had been developed. She had learned by contrast with an inexperienced heart, how cautious and unenthusiastic hers had become ; she had learned by reflection to mistrust the warmth of mere impulse —to see through it.

Cyril perceived the change, and sometimes reproached her for cold calculating habits of thought. He had had as little time as taste for abstract reflection; she much of both, and we can hardly ever recover enthusiasm after submitting for a certain length of time to the chill of analysis. So that while becoming more thoughtful, more gentle and tolerant, she had become graver too. We all know the process of trying to make flowers in a vase turn their faces towards us: in vain we turn them from the window, the flowers still twist and lean round till they can reach their beloved sunlight. It was thus with Cyril's heart. All that Maida's self-devotion and intense love could do to hold its affections was done, silently, anxiously, with many a fervent prayer; but they had found a brighter warmth, and to that they turned away.

It is a sore trial to the best of us to see the ends we know ourselves peculiarly able to meet less adequately fulfilled by others; to see them treated as if they had what they have not and we eminently *have*, and ourselves passed by as if therein deficient, would try the most generous. Maida was generous, but it pained her to hear Cyril reading poetry to Isabel, as if she could appreciate half its beauty. How could he take his new volume of

Tennyson to her side of the room, and read out to her with those impassioned tones of delight! To Isabel, who used, a few months back, to admire and copy out in her childish hand, ‘Grahame’s Sabbath’ and ‘Miss Seward’s Sonnets,’ while she herself, who knew every poem worth reading in two or three languages, could have re-echoed his admiration with a connoisseur’s fineness of taste. She was too proud to allow herself to regret *that* change, but she pitied his dulness of perception.

Nature seldom makes great mistakes; and Cyril was the most impulsively natural character. He did not want subtle criticism when enraptured by a beautiful poem, but full sympathy; and he got more of this while Isabel’s colour deepened as he read, and her eyes softened when answering his interrogative glance by another equally expressive of pleasure, than he could have found in Maida’s most appreciative words.

These two undisciplined minds were ‘consonant chords that shiver to one note.’ Now Maida would have gone on, perhaps, to explain why that shiver of transient ecstasy runs through the being when a fine poem is read, and Cyril, though courteous as Bayard himself, might have yawned behind his book till she had finished. It mattered not at all to his

belief in her taste that Isabel was admiring the reader more than the verses ; to Maida a difference so perceptible that she wondered that he, with his cultivated taste, could care for such indiscriminate ejaculations of praise as she heard going on. A woman almost needs to be herself a genius to estimate all the superior advantages which beauty possesses over intellect in woman.

‘ What *can* the silly little dear say worth listening to about *The two voices*,’ was her irritated thought. Never mind ; she looked a great deal that Cyril found well worth seeing.

After the reading conversation became general ; for Aunt Judith, who had been a silent listener, remarked, as Cyril closed the book, ‘ that if Miss Crewe was indeed so fond of poetry, she would give her some better worth remembering ; she had a packet of nice little “ leaflets ” in her work-basket :’ and several finely printed hymns were transferred to Isabel’s hand.

‘ Thank you,’ she said ; ‘ Caroline Veyse used to have these come in her godfather’s letters, I remember. I used to think he wrote them all. Did you like Caroline, Captain Rennie ? ’

‘ Oh, very much. A capital little creature, I thought—so full of fun.’

'I am glad Isabel did not put that question to me the first time I had seen her,' observed Maida, 'for then I should have said she was only a rattle—fashionable and quick-witted; but I liked her better as I saw more of her. Her unaffectedness is very pleasant beside such a mother.'

'But Maida, dear, *I hope* you were not vexed with me for kissing *her*, when we came away. I really could not help it.'

'Vexed, my love! why should you think so? It really is quite time for you to trust your own judgment; nothing is so bad as leaning always on other people's.'

'Yes, I daresay—only you are an exception; if you disapprove of anything, I am sure I had better not do it.'

'Then, you would never kiss anyone you so little liked, Isabel.'

'I never meant to do so, but in the hurry, you know, one says and does a hundred things which in cold blood one would think undesirable.'

'Speak for yourself, my dear—I don't.'

'No, I believe you,' interposed Cyril; 'you always seem to me to have a most happy self-complacency—as if you felt it really impossible ever to do or say the wrong thing. Now, for my part, I

feel tripping one way or another half the day ; such fallible mortals as Miss Crewe and myself, *you* can hardly feel for.'

' You misjudge me, Cyril.'

There was a concentration of pain and surprise in her voice ; of immeasurable loss in her heart—for now at last the bandage had completely fallen from her eyes, and she knew that she was no longer beloved. His presentation of her character seemed so cruelly false and unkind, not even a caricature, but a totally wrong version ; and from him, of all people in the world, who for so many years had been voucher for her own self-ideal ! Reflection a little explained it ; she so much lived according to her principles that she easily identified her own conduct with these. Now, everyone who knew her, knew that she thought her principles excellent, and her standard of right and wrong unimpeachable. That she often fell below it, and owned the inferiority of practice to theory, with deepest contrition, could not be generally known ; and what Cyril had said of her in his eagerness to sympathise with Isabel, was probably a common opinion.

CHAPTER VIII.

Their life stood full at blessed noon,
I, only I, had passed away:
'To-morrow and to-day,' they cried,
I was of yesterday.

I shivered comfortless, but cast
No chill across the tablecloth:
I, all-forgotten, shivered; sad
To stay, and yet to part how loth.

I passed from the familiar room,
I, who from love had passed away,
Like the remembrance of a guest
That tarrieth but a day.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

PETER had just comfortably settled himself in his armchair after luncheon on the second of February, with the last number of Blackwood in his hand, when Aunt Judith knocked at the study-door.

'Well, Aunt Judith, you're not going out on your cottage rounds this dismal snowy day, I suppose?'

'I want to have a little quiet talk with you, Peter, about Cyril and your young ward. Do you know whether there is anything going on between them?'

‘Don’t you hear? a shuttle-cock, out in the hall; they seem to keep it up famously.’

‘Peter, it was a very serious question which I asked, and to trifle about it shows sad levity of mind.’

‘But, my dear aunt, I know no more than you, or in saddest seriousness I would answer. Cyril is, you are well aware, a born slave to womankind, and Isabel, like most girls of her age, probably enjoys having him at her beck and call—but she is a mere child still—’

‘How *can* you talk such nonsense?’

‘Allow me to finish my sentence; and assuredly, Cyril would never dream of marrying when he has nothing but his halfpay to live on.’

‘I was not thinking of what he dreams of doing, but what he *is* doing to make her dream.’

Peter was impetuously cutting open the pages of his magazine, but as she said this his hand was stayed, and he was silent for an instant, gazing into the fire reflectively before he replied:

‘You are right—that must be considered; perhaps I ought to have thought of it before, but Maida must know; it *can’t* be, you know, or she would have told me—she notices things so quickly.’

‘Yes, and so do I, and I sometimes think there

may be reasons why just this escapes her notice. One thing is certain, that an attraction even stronger than usual is standing in the way of your cousin doing his duty, and keeping him idle here—the question is *what?*'

‘Your presence, perhaps, Aunt Judith,’ said Peter, with a malicious smile.

‘If you won’t find this out, I must.’

‘For heaven’s sake, aunt, leave Cyril alone. I will give him a word of caution, if I can find fitting opportunity; but interference with a nature like his will do no end of harm. As you pass the bookcase, be so kind as to give me the eighth volume of the “Biographical Dictionary,” here’s a reference to a man whose date I cannot recall;’ and with impatient need to free himself from the insisting expression of her countenance, he deliberately re-opened his book and went on reading.

The heavy energy of Aunt Judith’s footsteps, as she left the room, showed that in taking his hint, she loaded him with speechless condemnation. In the drawing-room she found Maida alone, a book in her hand also; but, as her aunt quickly noticed, it was held upside down.

‘Girls *are* different now from what they were in *our* day, to be sure!’

Maida got up and stirred the fire.

‘ Fancy you or me, when we were young, giving up the whole day to the entertainment of a gentleman ! Singing to him all the morning, playing at some game of romps half the afternoon, and now only listen to them ! ’

Maida did not need to be told to listen to the bursts of laughter that came first from one part of the house and then from the other, as Cyril and Isabel went about collecting holly and ivy for a grand fire in the hall grate. For some minutes it had been costing her a horrible struggle, and all she could trust herself to say in answer was a cold generalisation :

‘ Isabel has very high spirits now and then.’

‘ High spirits ! well and good ; but that is not any reason for such barefaced flirtation—unless indeed it be something more—an engagement. Perhaps you are in their secret, Maida ? ’

‘ It is clearly no secret that they like each other ; as two pleasant people often do,’ she replied, forcing herself to a smile of seeming indifference. ‘ I know no more than you do, aunt.’

‘ Well, I must say I *am* surprised ; time was when everyone put you and Cyril down for being as good as engaged.’ And as the cruel words left her, she

pursued their impression with one of her ‘heart-picking’ looks; as if she was resolved to find out the wound and probe it well. But Maida was equal to the occasion in her habitual strength of self-command; and well aware that anything she said about Cyril was pretty sure to be repeated to him by his aunt, she had all the support of a woman’s pride, and could say with an unmoved countenance: ‘Very likely; it is the commonest thing possible to make such mistakes. But as to Isabel, if you really think her conduct so reprehensible, I must take myself to task for being such a bad duenna. I certainly have sometimes thought she went rather far, but I have never liked to say anything to make her uncomfortable.’

It was true. She was so conscious of personal motives for wishing Isabel’s conduct less demonstrative, that she distrusted her own judgment, and with the conscientiousness that was her marked characteristic, she had refrained from the least word of censure for fear of being unjust. Just then both the culprits burst into the room, rosy with exertion and laughing like children at some truly childish joke, which Isabel wanted Maida to hear, and Aunt Judith’s sombre face at once extinguished.

How indescribably old and altered it made her

niece feel to be thus caught in grave consultation as to the measure of distance which should exist in Cyril's relations with another woman !

' Come along into the hall, and see what a blaze we have got. Miss Crewe says you will find it so useful, for it lights up every corner and cranny—not one cobweb can escape your eye now.'

(*And this was the way he and she had been thinking of her ! As a mere housekeeper ! What a stab at the image self-love would fain preserve !*)

' You have a headache, dear Maida,' said Isabel coaxingly, as they stood by the hall fire, for she was feeling a little compunctionous at having left her so long; ' and this smell of singed evergreens is not quite pleasant, is it ? And your hand is so cold.'

Cyril was at once beside her, chafing first one hand, then the other, as a kindly brother might ; and Maida was trying her best to look as she used to do when he had done it—oh ! so often in many a past winter ; but heartache was too strong for her, and she drew away her hands, saying almost pettishly, ' Thank you, but I want to go and rest a little before dinner. How I wish Aunt Judith *would* wear boots, or longer dresses if she must stamp about in those terrible high-low affairs !' For

as the younger trio stood by the crackling pile, Miss Rennie had come out of the drawing-room, and slowly crossed the hall, and mounted its flight of stairs, with all her uncomeliness of dress and gait in painful brightness of illumination. If there was no other reason for careful attention to the so-called trifles of external appearance, there is this, that at all times trifling sights affect the human mind ; even in violent pain they strike us, even in deepest grief we can observe and speak of them—perhaps rather more than we could notice things of greater import, just because they are foreign to the grief oppressing us.

Peter felt any weight on his placid mind burdensome till it was discharged ; and that evening the ladies had not left the dining-room many minutes before he cast about for some way of sounding Cyril. As he was nothing of a diplomatist, he could discover no process so sure as a point-blank beginning.

‘ How do you like this port, Cyril ? It’s a bottle of my father’s best. I thought we needed some extra creature comforts this cheerless day ; but you seem to have felt it quite jolly. Isabel Crewe is a nice little thing, isn’t she ? ’

‘ Yes ; bright enough to make a summer of the

darkest days that one has the luck to spend near her.'

'It is just her being so charming that gives me some anxiety. I wish she was of age and well off my hands. Old Wakeman—the other trustee for her property—is always in alarm lest she should take up with some fortune-hunter,—you know she would be rather a catch that way.'

'I was not aware,' said Cyril, holding up his wine-glass to the light as if critically examining its contents, 'that guardians had to direct the affections of their wards.'

'Nor have they: but they are in honour bound to protect their fortunes, and the one often follows the other.'

'Then, if I understand you aright, you and Mr. Wakeman would think it your duty to forbid the bans, unless Miss Crewe had found an equal purse as well as an "equal mind" in the man she honoured with her preference?'

'Not quite that—come, come my dear fellow, there is nothing like frankness after all: what I do feel my duty to prevent is her burning her fingers in my home while I am responsible for looking after her.'

There was a long pause,—long enough for Peter

to crack and eat three walnuts, while his companion stared hard into the fire: and when at last he spoke his voice was lower, and his manner very grave.

‘Do you think she *has* at all burned her fingers, Peter?’

‘Nay, *I* cannot tell you. I am a bad judge of this kind of thing,—but you see you have been thrown very much together lately; and Aunt Judith seems to think it hardly wise unless something serious is intended on both sides.’

‘Confound the old woman!’

‘Well, I don’t blame her for speaking to me about it; you see I was the right person. (Fill your glass, will you.) Nor do I attach much weight to her remarks; women are always ready to run up a romance about nothing at all.’

Cyril got up as he heard this, and let drive at the fire with a vehement onset of poker which prevented his cousin from finishing what he was about to say. And when poker, shovel, and tongs had all taken part in the stormy clatter, Cyril asked in his quietest tones of suppressed wrath—

‘Did you tell the dear old lady, then, that it was nothing at all?’

‘Not I—I knew nothing about it.’

‘Did she seem to think it much more than nothing at all?’

‘Really you had better ask her opinion yourself. I feel quite unable to do it justice. She and Maida will go into committee about it no doubt, and give you ripe results. But now suppose we adjourn to the other room.’

CHAPTER IX.

Rather desires to be forgotten quight,
Than question made of his calamitie;
For hart's deep sorrow hates both life and light.

SPENSER.

Non sa ancor di quanto mal radice
Questo le sia, sebben non va co 'l fallo
La pena allor' allor vendicatrice,
Ma lo segu'ella con poco intervallo.

ARIOSTO.

IN spite of the conduct she so severely reprobated, Aunt Judith had been unable to convince herself that Isabel *was* in love with her nephew. If she thought it certain one hour, the intense modesty of eighteen completely baffled her curiosity in the next; but now she thought it her duty to find out the exact state of the young girl's feelings, and seized the first opportunity that offered for her researches. The hard business-like way in which women of mature years will think and speak of heart affairs is often in shocking contrast to the timid tenderness of sympathy with which they are approached at an earlier age; but the change, though painful to the sentimentalist, seems natural, almost

inevitable, when we reflect upon its cause. Apart from all personal experience, time cannot fail to rob love of its first supremacy of interest; to make what is a mystery of passion to the individual a vulgar fact, a most commonplace generalization, to those who have seen the dawn of many attachments,—the flutter, the glow, and the despair of many an ardent love,—and *then* compared ‘the vanities of after and before.’* To those who have thus watched the rise and fall of many a passing empire, it is difficult to treat each new victim to the passion with that respectful and attentive reserve which it is ever inclined to claim: it is more natural to smile compassionately, and wonder how soon a lucid interval may be hoped for; and when, as in the case of Miss Rennie, there is a vein of sternness in every thought, it provokes something like contempt to watch the transparent disguises elaborated by people, who, being for the time blinded themselves, seek thus to blind their neighbours. To the cold-blooded spectator it seems as absurd, as if the master of a ship who was tacking this way and that to reach a given port, should declare that to *it*, his manœuvres had no reference. And it was thus possible for Aunt Judith to make her soundings in the heart

* Tennyson.

of Isabel without any of that pathetic interest which a younger woman would have felt.

The morning after she had given Peter her caution, instead of going at once to her own room as usual, she pursued Isabel, and found her with the Navy List open in her hands, which was immediately shut as Miss Rennie approached. Now if one could see what name a young girl looks to first in a list of names, whether of subscribers to some charity or men in office—be it what it may—one would probably come to a right guess as to the occupant of her heart. But this Miss Rennie did not know, and so she began—

‘I am glad to find you alone, my dear. I wanted to have a few words with you. You must excuse me if I speak a little bluntly of what is very near my heart—my dear nephew Cyril.’

Isabel coloured crimson, and opened her workbox, but said nothing.

‘An elder relative sees cause for anxiety sooner perhaps than younger people can, and perhaps *I* know his very impressible—mercurial temperament better than even these cousins to whom he is so strongly attached.’

As this exordium drew nothing more than a polite ‘I daresay you do,’ she went on with less am-

bignity: ‘The truth is, I am not a little afraid of poor Cyril’s head being quite turned by so much marked attention from a pretty young lady like yourself.’

‘I don’t know what you mean,’ cried Isabel, with indignant surprise.

‘If *you* don’t, my dear, every one else in the house does. Such encouragement as you give can hardly be misunderstood. If you were not so young and inexperienced in the ways of the world, you would be more cautious; for what *can* a man think of a girl who gives him all her time, and most of her conversation, but that she means to accept his addresses as soon as he chooses to propose? Now, if you do mean this——’

‘I neither know nor care what you or Captain Rennie think. I never dreamed of *meaning* any such thing; and I have n’t given him more of my time than was simply kind and unavoidable. When you and Mr. Hatton and Maida were all busy about your own concerns, who *could* he talk to or read with besides me? I really wish you would not speak as if I was still a child. I saw much more of the world before I came here than I have during the last year, and I know enough of it to be sure that it is *very* unkind to say such things as these to me. I wish I had never come here!’

Tears relieved her passion, and she fled out of the room before Miss Rennie could say another word. At that moment Peter was talking to his sister on the same subject. She had come to him on some domestic business ; and just as she was leaving the room he remembered the other.

‘ I say, May, do you think anything particular is going on between Cyril and your little pet which we ought to stop ? ’

If he had been enquiring whether a mousetrap ought to be set in a storeroom cupboard, he could not have spoken in a more off-hand manner ; his fully-engrossed mind little realizing the intensities of life to which he so lightly referred.

‘ I am sure I cannot tell you—you know better than I ; of course you remember all Mr. Wakeman said—but do not hinder me now, please ; Barnes is waiting for his orders.’

And she left the room and the subject which seemed just then intolerable. Peter, glad enough to dismiss a train of ideas with which he was at a loss how to deal, nibbed his pen with great nicety of touch, and continued his treatise on the manners and customs of the Britons at the time of Cæsar’s landing—these seeming to him at that moment of far greater importance than those of any living creature.

In retrospect—years later, that short crisis when self triumphed over conscience, will recur to Maida's mind with an indelible accuracy of outline, even to the least detail: she will see again the pale sunshine that streamed through cold fog upon the bright study carpet, and hear again the shrill song of canaries on the landing, which she muffled for an instant as she closed the half-opened door to answer, '*I cannot tell you—you know better than I.*' It will all be remembered by her, as the scenes of great crime are remembered; for there and then, for the first time, passion tempted her successfully to step into the wrong path, to violate truth and mercy. But at the time she never thought she had said or done anything to repent of—she was too unhappy; she felt as if her Maker owed her some compensation for an immeasurable loss; what she owed to Him in humble sacrifice, to her fellow-creatures in loving service, was for the time quite forgotten or refused.

Cyril, too, was now almost as miserable. He had eagerly questioned his aunt, whom he had found alone, just after Isabel had left the room, as to *her* impressions about Miss Crewe's having any liking for him; it cost the shy proud man a great effort, but for the sake of what he hoped to hear, he

overcame his repugnance and asked—questions which Aunt Judith could now answer according to her own heart's desire ; for the idea of Cyril daring already to think of marriage at all had scandalized her—much more the idea of his choosing for his wife a little fine-ladyish chit like Isabel, who was as fond of frivolities as himself, and always wore silk stockings.

‘ You need give yourself no further trouble on that score, Cyril. She means nothing whatever by all this fiddle-faddle of smiling and singing, and asking you to read poetry. I have just heard her say so in so many words, and no one but a fool would be taken in by a pretty face and affected sweetness.’

‘ There’s not a more unaffected girl in England.’

‘ Ah ! so you think ; men are easy dupes. Was it at all *likely* that a girl with her expectations should mean to have you ? Pshaw ! it’s a mere pastime ; and if you take my advice, you will not waste more of yours—which *ought* to be spent elsewhere—in dangling after people who don’t want you. Why, when I was talking to Maida about this yesterday, what was her remark ? “ People so often make these mistakes, and fancy love where there is nothing of the sort.” It’s vanity--neither more nor less—that deceives you so easily.’

‘Thank you, Aunt, I don’t want a sermon just now;’ and so saying he strode hastily out of the room, out of the house and garden, for a many mile walk in the fog-thickened forest glades. He had a terrible load of pain, and shame, and anger to try to walk off. For in *this* a man is not unfrequently duped by a woman: when she bears witness to the feelings of another woman, he is habituated to accepting her conclusions as those of a closer observer, a more discriminating judge. So that now Cyril made no allowance for the instincts of maidenly pride, which so often hurry people into downright falsehood in their dread of self-betrayal: he did not picture to himself the way in which his aunt might have baited Isabel into false assertions, though smarting himself at every side of his nature under the acrid influence of her tongue. He did not know that there is no secret kept with such an agony of self-disguise as the first love of an inexperienced girl. And though he could in no way bring Isabel’s conduct into agreement with his aunt’s report, he could no longer trust his own enchanting suspicion that he was more than liked; and therefore went at one bound of reaction to the opposite belief—that he could never be loved by such a perfect creature as she, that he was a

presumptuous donkey to have ever thought it possible.

Meanwhile, Miss Rennie herself had the satisfaction of believing *her* share of duty done with regard to these incautious juniors; if a harsh temper had been gratified in the performance, a sincere belief that it *was* duty reconciled her conscience to causing so much pain. She did not guess how much. No one cursed with a bad judgment can ever see to the end of the damage that defective power may occasion: happily, for it would be enough to break anyone's heart to be able to trace out the never-ending ramifications of consequent mischief.

All the rest of the day no one in the house quite understood what was the matter with the others. Cyril, every one could see, was gone into one of his most inaccessible moods of superb sulkiness; and Peter, usually silent and meditative, had to do duty all dinner-time as converser. Isabel had no small talk for anybody that day. She had not yet learned the dismal art of smiling gaily while her heart was wrung with sorrow, or of asking questions with an air of interest while her thoughts were absorbed in the enquiry, 'How long *can* this grief go on and not kill me?' In a word, she had not yet lived nineteen years in this world.

Next morning's post brought an unlooked-for revolution of thought. Cyril was appointed to a ship, and had orders to take the command of it without delay. 'Hurrah!' he exclaimed, throwing the letter across the table to Maida, 'Just in the nick of time. I'm sick to death of being so long on shore.'

CHAPTER X.

And through her half-formed dreams struck blank
Sadness of truth, that chid and mocked
Their vanity, and her heart sank.

JOSEPH DOWNE's *Proud Shepherd's Tragedy*.

I oft have wiped these watchful eyes,
Concealed my cares, and curbed my sighs ;
In spite of grief, to let thee see
I wore an endless smile for thee.

HESTER WESLEY.

THERE was so much to do in getting the sailor's things ready for his departure, such a planning how to get work done and commissions executed, that all embarrassments of feeling seemed to be merged in a general fever of preparation. All but Isabel's; no one, as she fancied, seemed to care for her services. Aunt Judith was cutting out shirts with vehement industry, and Maida, busy in her sitting-room 'overhauling' his seafaring chest with Cyril, had scarcely a word to spare for her.

'No, thank you, there's really nothing you can do yet,' she answered hastily, when for the third time Isabel had timidly asked if there was *nothing* she

could do to help ; ‘unless Aunt has got any work ready downstairs.’

And Captain Rennie said not a word, and did not even look her way, but appeared to be in profound contemplation of an old uniform surtout. How Isabel envied Maida her privileges as she left them busy together !

Miss Rennie did not manage her refusal of assistance very graciously ; perhaps the tight pursing up of her mouth, as Isabel came and took up several squared pieces of calico that lay on the floor, had more connection with the accuracy of her measurements than with her very slight esteem of Isabel’s powers as a workwoman, but it frightened the anxious girl.

‘Leave those all alone, if you please, Miss Crewe ; you will only hinder me.’

‘I hoped I might be allowed to do some of the seams.’

‘You would be half the day doing one—and I have sent for three of the biggest girls from the school ;’ and with a loud stridulent tearing of several yards’ length she silenced further remark. A heavy clumping of boots along the passage, and a kind of random hit at the dining-room door, announced the arrival of her village adjutants, and Isabel retreated,

thinking each of those clumsy-handed girls just then far happier than herself. She would not leave the drawing-room that morning a minute longer than was necessary for getting her work. Captain Rennie might come in any minute, and she felt as if being alone with him for ever so short a time would be an infinite solace. No one in the house seemed to think his going any sorrow to her: *he* could not doubt it, if she might but throw off the horrible restraint of manner Miss Rennie's cruel comments had imposed. But he only once opened the door, looked in and retired; and her pride began to ache afresh.

Some time after luncheon she was still alone in the room, surrounded with bits and scraps of silk and American leather, when Maida entered, looking tired and very much inclined to let one fit of crying follow another.

'Poor child!' she said, laying her hand caressingly on Isabel's shoulder, 'how lonely you must have been all this morning: we really had not a minute to spend with you: what is it you are making?'

'Only a housewife for Captain Rennie; he asked me one day to make him one. Is there any harm in doing so, dear Maida?'

'Oh, no harm; but he has one already—the last I made was quite new, I sent it out last Christmas.'

‘But you don’t mind his having mine too?’

‘Of course not; and I did not know of this nice American leather; so they will be quite different. Are you going out to-day? Peter and Cyril have just started off to find out about the early trains.’

Poor Isabel! she had so depended on being asked to walk with them as usual.

Dinner that day was very late, Maida and her aunt still later in coming down; for they had been swiftly stitching to the last minute in the upstairs sitting-room; so that in just such a ruddy gloom of firelight as that in which they had first met, Cyril found Isabel alone when he came down from dressing, with her head leaning against the mantelpiece. Neither of them spoke at first, then Cyril, with his occasional haughtiness of manner, tried to throw some semblance of interest into his stiff remarks upon the cheerless weather, but was eyeing the brooch (his Maltese brooch) with which Isabel’s lace fall was fastened. He had not seen her wear it for some weeks past, and just now he was nervously quick-sighted. Isabel said ‘yes’ or ‘no’ at random; and then, with an abrupt change of voice, ‘If in anything I have vexed you lately, please don’t think I meant to do so, Captain Rennie.

I wanted just to say that — before — you have seemed vexed and angry' —

'Vexed with you! angry with you! if it was not just the other way, if that were *possible*, I should not have been so terribly vexed by other people.'

The words were not very clearly pronounced on either side, but their meaning was perfectly intelligible, and so acutely felt, that for an instant they held each other's hand with a most eloquent grasp. But Peter shuffled in just then, and beginning to grumble at Maida letting the dinner get cold, and Aunt Judith sending down to say she must have her's upstairs, so as not to leave off working, he restored calm to Isabel's pulse, and gave Cyril an excuse for relieving his nerves by laughter.

'Oh,' he said, 'don't quarrel with the good old soul for that; she likes it—she's never so happy as when she's making herself a martyr on my account,—it gives her new energy for pitching into me on every possible occasion. If she thought me less of a sinner it would not be half the fun.'

'But she is really very much attached to you, I think,' observed Isabel.

'I should be an ungrateful dog to doubt it,' he replied, feeling now more in charity with his aunt than he had been for some time; 'but the worst of

it is, no one can choose the mode in which people prove their attachment.'

As he spoke Maida came in, and wished to know whose attachment he spoke of too much to ask him to tell her. That evening she wished, for the first time, that he a little knew half the trouble it had given her to pack his huge sailor's chest. It was usually her glad pride to lavish for his comfort a hundred unnoticed sacrifices; now she wished he could value them half so much as he seemed to value the pains Isabel had taken to learn an old Spanish ballad which he had copied into her book, or the housewife, which she put into his hands, very shyly, when she said good-night. He admired and thanked her for it as if it was a *chef-d'œuvre* of feminine skill, and never heeded Maida's delicate work in the handkerchief she had been hemming as fast as she could, whilst he and Isabel were together at the piano singing. But at the best of times the costs of methodical neatness and forecast are quite unappreciated by those who are temperamentally heedless and negligent of the future. Never having himself undertaken the careful process his good Maida had perfected, he accepted it as negligently as the blessing of air and light. A cheerful 'thank you for all your capital arrange-

ments !' was all she got in acknowledgment of hours of making, and mending, and packing ; and had she missed even that, she would not have resigned or trusted to any other hand the duties that for years had been her greatest delight. But was she not strangely forgetful of the first principles of human nature when she expected Cyril to love her as one less familiar might be loved ? How could she fail to see that not only did he know her mind and heart much too well for imagination to invest them with its charms, but that he knew she knew *him* as thoroughly also, and could not therefore expect from *her* love, however warm and true, that half-adoring admiration which it is so sweet to accept, that the weakest and poorest nature who can offer it sincerely, is generally preferred by man to the noblest woman who cannot pretend to see in him an unfelt distance of superiority. By being treated as if they were heroes, men begin to feel almost heroic—sometimes to be so, and this is to poor human nature so great a consolation, so strong a stimulant, that surely no one should grudge it to their neighbour.

Now, how could Cyril hope that Maida would think of him as a hero, when she had again and again seen him poke half-a-dozen half-written notes

on business into the fire in boyish impatience—and at last brought his trouble to an end by furnishing him with a rough copy?—or how, with his masculine deficiency of tenderness, could he suppose that he was the beau-ideal of manly grace to a woman whom he had consulted as to the mending of his old boots—who had actually now and then put a patch on an evening coat which he called too ‘seedy’ to send to the tailor’s?

It was so different between him and Isabel Crewe, that he now wondered he had ever supposed himself in love with anyone else before. Maida was the kindest, dearest, best, and most sister-like creature; ‘Heaven bless her for all she has been to me!’ was his thought that last evening at Maplehurst. ‘I only wish she would not cut me so short when I begin to talk of *her*. I suppose she and Peter are of the same mind about that.’

He could only conjecture about this, for Maida never invited him to speak of it. A very deep feeling needs the assurance of sympathy before it can venture on direct expression, and this assurance Maida could not give.

CHAPTER XI.

Joseph Wolff thinks the duty of a missionary is to mind his own business, and to let others go on in the way they think right. Moreover, there is a great deal of vanity in trying to set everything right ; and a person who acts thus does injury to his own spirit.—*AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF J. WOLFF.*

Ben' è verace amor quel che m' ha preso,
E ben mi stringe forte. DANTE.

No departure can make a greater blank than that of a person like Cyril Rennie. His buoyant energies had stimulated everyone in the little household; and if Peter missed his frequent blaze of enthusiasm, his genial humour, and never-tiring tales of foreign adventure, how much more was the loss of these and still pleasanter things felt in the drawing-room ! Why even little Jack the gardener's boy looked dull and down-hearted for several days after the Captain left; for he adored him, as every underling he ever had to do with usually did.

Maida's heart ached with a worse sorrow than the loss of his presence only : she could not forget that as Cyril drove out of the court-yard, he turned and waved his hat to some one in the house—to Isabel

looking out of the hall window—not to her, who had run out in the biting east wind to beg him to button up his great coat, and stood outside, regardless of the cold, lest she should miss a farewell nod.

The grief she had often felt at previous separations gave her a perfect understanding of all that made Isabel's voice so low and Isabel's eyes so weak; but she would not recognise it. She felt as if it would be giving a kind of sanction to a horrible absurdity, if she took any notice of her feelings. What were they but child's play compared to *hers*? How could the fancy of a few short months be compared to the intensity of an almost life-long attachment? She would not deign to compare them, and it made her feel quite cross to see Isabel looking so dejected. What were Cyril's goings or comings to *her*? How foolish it was of her to look so red and eager when Cyril's first letter came! He only begged to be very kindly remembered to her—of course—any gentleman would. There was nothing in that: but further on, 'Will Miss Crewe have the kindness to take care of the geraniums I struck and the myrtle cuttings in the greenhouse?' There was more in that than Maida knew: the myrtle had been in a bouquet Isabel had worn, and left on the pianoforte one evening weeks ago; and Cyril had

taken care to show her what had become of its contents. So there was at least enough in his letter to give her a little thrill of delight. It was full of strong-worded expressions of affectionate gratitude towards Maida, but something much sweeter was missed, and one of her sighs that day had more sorrow in it than all Isabel's tears. In spite of these, any close observer might have been struck with the increased firmness of look in Isabel's face. In Cyril's presence it softened almost to silliness, for he was a man whom no hardy-natured woman could entirely please. And probably no charm had been more potent with him than Isabel's complete natural subservience. This was the unconscious attitude of her very gentle nature with everyone she lovingly respected, but what she felt for Captain Rennie was more; it was such profound and humble admiration, that in her frequent recurrence to his aunt's admonition, she pained herself more by fearing that he might have thought her presumptuous in mistaking the motive of his attentions than by supposing that he had read her heart too soon. Occupied by the aguish emotions of her own young heart, she never for an instant dreamed of what was going on in Maida's. True, that lately she had fancied her rather more stern, a little apt to criticise, and some-

what slow to praise and caress her as she used ; but the reason she never guessed, attributing any inequalities of temper to the ceaseless chafing of Aunt Judith's importunate society.

That one word of Scripture about ‘not suffering sin upon thy brother,’ held in Miss Rennie’s mind a place quite out of proportion with her remembrance of all the texts that inculcate leniency and slowness to judge ; and while running a tilt against every fault which she discerned in those about her, she suffered the sin of censoriousness in her own soul with hardly any check of conscience ; a sin so abhorrent to the philosophical mind of her studious nephew, that all her animadversions upon his idolatry of intellect were just an irritating jangle of words, ‘conveying no meaning but dislike ; and they never lodged in his conscience one serious thought of the real danger to which she desired to draw his attention,—which she earnestly prayed he might see, before life’s short day drew nearer to its close,—and having so prayed in all sincerity, came down and at once defeated by an ill-timed attack the *immediate* effects of her prayer.

‘ I declare there is more Christian charity among infidels than you ever seem to exercise in your judgment of fellow-Christians ! ’ Peter used to say

when she urged him to make some stand against the evils she saw or fancied.

She was in argument most provoking : so right in her zeal for good, so wrong in her mode of proving it, that evil was the inevitable result. So inconclusive too in reasoning, as she called her didactic style of speech, that she brought into danger of contempt the most sacred conclusions of the heart; and when she saw by Peter and Maida's manner that she could not convince, she could and did hurl at them a text or a religious truism which was sure to defeat any further argument they might adduce, because it *was* true, though perfectly inapplicable to the case in point.

Maida was in terror of a household revolution all the time Aunt Judith stayed ; for not to interfere with other people's servants formed no part of her idea of duty. Whether in rebuke or encouragement, she always took a line of her own quite irrespective of the judgment of their employers. It was not wonderful, therefore, that Aunt Judith's translation to another house was secretly rejoiced in at Maplehurst.

Until the hour she left, Isabel had vainly longed to find out what she had said to Captain Rennie about herself ; for she never doubted that his ex-

pression about being terribly vexed by other people referred to his aunt's strictures ; yet the mere possibility of Maida being involved in like unkindness made it impossible to ask *her*. One desperate attempt she made when a seizure of passionate regret had melted all the fortifications of pride. Maida came in unexpectedly one morning, when Isabel thought her safe upstairs, and found her sobbing vehemently at the piano, with her head half-resting against a song she and Cyril used to practise together.

'What is it, dear child ?' asked Maida, putting her arm round hers and trying to kiss away the last flow of tears ; 'what makes you so unhappy ? I cannot bear to see this sweet face so pulled about by foolish sobs—what is it, my love ?'

'Oh, I don't know why it seems so much worse to-day,—remembering it all,—and feeling all that happy, happy time gone—'

'Such pleasant times *will* go, dearest ; no one knows it better than I ; but we must all look forward to better.' She hardly knew what to say just then, but was making an effort to be extremely tender ; and seeing the light that came into the girl's face as she said this, she needed the effort still more.

'Ah ! but it seems such a long, long way off—and

then, Maida dear, there is one thing that has been fretting and paining me for many days. Do tell me, did you think what your aunt did about my manner to him? was I—did I seem at all more taken up with him than you liked?’

Unintentionally Maida’s clasp relaxed, and she turned away her head a little as if to look if the fire wanted a stir, while she answered, ‘ Oh, my dear, I would not vex myself about that now. Perhaps you were a little more with him than was quite *selon les règles* of usual society, but it was my fault if you were, and Cyril has such a peculiar fascination of manner—everyone spoils him just in the same way.’

‘ Then you don’t think —’

‘ Nay, I neither think, or wish you to trouble yourself more about it. Aunt Judith is very old-fashioned in all her ideas. But now I want you to go down to old Betty Clerk’s for me, and tell her that she and her three neighbours may come up for soup this afternoon—will you?’

Well did Maida know that by giving this turn to her reply, she was leaving unanswered a question that Isabel could not repeat, or, after such an answer, try to make more explicit. She was attempting to cheat her own conscience by dint of that mysterious power for suppressing some part of con-

sciousness which belongs to the human will. For if she had once recognised to herself the full meaning of what—in spite of herself—she perceived, she *must* have acted differently. She must then have felt it too cruel to withhold a helpful sympathy. She therefore continued to ignore that there was any call for it. Hard as it is to resign the love we have for years believed our own; it is far harder to allow that it is given to and accepted by another. Besides, as Maida's strong intellect again and again urged, it was nonsense to think of this child's mushroom-growth of fancy as any cause of deep suffering—how could it be? A school-girl's fit of sentimental folly, nothing more; to give it the indulgence of serious notice would only prolong it.

Alas! we seldom measure the claims of those who are in grief upon our pity by what they *feel*, so much as by what we *think*, and are thus as unjust as we are unmerciful. Neither feeling nor suffering holds any kind of proportion with its cause. It is very unreasonable of a head to ache cruelly because some trifle has offended the digestive nerves; it is very great folly for a heart to ache incessantly because one voice, one face is missed; but that foolish pain is common, and there are cases on record in which it has proved incurable.

CHAPTER XII.

Folly in the sense of fun, fooling, or dawdling can easily be borne: as Talleyrand said, 'I find nonsense singularly refreshing.'

EMERSON.

MAIDA would not recognise what Isabel was really pining for, but she set herself to find some means of procuring her pleasure, as eagerly as people are wont to give themselves to any duty but the one which is most irksome, and most incumbent on them to perform. The plan she devised with this view involved much self-denial, and was therefore all the more acceptable to a conscience secretly distressed. She invited Miss Veyse to spend a fortnight at Maplehurst, having first ascertained that her brother had no objection to such an inroad.

Isabel was delighted; the uncalled-for kissings and 'dearings' of a young friend seemed to cheer her spirits more than anything Maida could say or do; and though Miss Veyse's conversation appeared to the fastidious woman as empty and insipid as

school-girl talk could be, its easy flow of rattle seemed positively to exhilarate Isabel.

This was in the drawing-room when the ladies were alone together, for in Peter's presence the visitor's manner during the first two or three days was in suspense between silent staring and simpering surprise at every word he dropped. Caroline had never met with any one so odd, and was in the state of mind that keeps a lively parrot still listening to quite a new voice.

'How peculiar he is, Isabel! How different from every one else! Do you know that he actually told me to take the kettle off the fire this morning when I first came down to the breakfast-room, hardly lifting his eyes to say "good morning" first?'

'He was reading, I suppose; he is very much absorbed as soon as he opens a book.'

'But, my dear, when a lady comes in, and almost a stranger, not to say a guest! Only think what Mademoiselle Buchôt would say to such manners; conceive the bridling of her long thin neck if she had been treated with such nonchalance!'

'Ah well, Carry, but these dear Hattons don't submit to the standard of a Mademoiselle Buchôt; when you know the place better, you will think them charming. Did you ever see a more graceful

woman than my dear Maida ? for her age, of course, I mean.'

'I'm a little afraid of her, to tell the truth ; she looks as if she was setting herself a task in being so kind and courteous ; Mamma calls her freezing.'

And freezing Maida did certainly look when anything of what she thought 'foolery' was exhibited : for example, when Miss Veyse coloured and looked nervous while thanking Peter for offering to show her his valuable collection of coins. 'A piece of good nature, natural enough ; why did the silly girl make so much of it?' For Maida, used from childhood to the eccentricities of her brother, could make no just allowance for their effect on a nature that had been moulded from her birth by strictly conventional rules.

'If you will come into my study now, Miss Veyse, for the half-hour's rest my book allows, I'll show you some curious pieces. Isabel knows them all, but no wise man trusts other people with the key of his cabinet of coins.'

But it was some minutes before Caroline could at all forget her pretty wondering self in that Russia-leather scented room, and begin really to attend to the coins. In her total ignorance she hazarded questions which, to be answered at all, needed many words of

explanation. More than half an hour slipped away; and when Maida returned to see if the girls were coming out, she found her brother, usually shy and taciturn, administering a drench of information far exceeding the capacities of his hearer. Miss Veyse had touched one of his strongest springs of interest by a random enquiry, which she had not the least wish to have answered, but to which it pleased him to afford the fullest reply. What her eyes wanted of intelligence was well made up for by a joyous vivacity of expression, and Peter not unnaturally mistook the one for the other.

By degrees she began to feel less amazed at him, and as her nervous *gêne* relaxed, her constitutional loquacity resumed its wonted channels. There is no such merciless fluency of speech as that of a timid person when sufficiently encouraged to burst through previous restraints. And now Caroline prattled away to her host with rapid utterance and unsparing self-enjoyment. To him it was quite a new experience. Maida and Isabel were used to respect his silent moods, to wink at the book which often lay open on the breakfast-table beside him; but Caroline Veyse, having convinced herself of his radical mildness and sincere indifference to the opinion a fashionable young lady might form of him, did not heed any

tacit check upon her propensity for being heard, and would continue her rather pointless narratives and occasional appeals to Mr. Hatton, quite undaunted by his obvious desire for silence.

He was surprisingly patient with her; those pretty white teeth of which he saw so much, must have made her lips very persuasive; for after the day she had rallied him on being so dull as to want to read a stupid old book during breakfast, it never again appeared on the table while she was at his house.

‘I am afraid you find that girl a terrible bore,’ said Maida to him one day, ‘but she has certainly brightened up little Isabel wonderfully, and I think if you don’t mind we may as well ask her to stay a week longer.’

‘Mind! oh no, not at all; she’s rather amusing than otherwise; get her to stay by all means if Isabel likes.’

‘Wonders will never cease!’ thought Maida, when she found her brother playing at battledore with Caroline the following day, during one of his usually most secluded hours, with one hand comfortably lodged in his pocket, and his reading slippers on, to be sure, but still a marvellous apparition, thus idling in the hall.

‘Dear me, Peter! what *shall* we see next! Where is Isabel, Miss Veyse? I thought she was your playfellow all the time I heard this bang-banging going on.’

‘Yes, but she hit her hand against the cornice there, so I just ran in and asked Mr. Hatton to take her place while she went to put something to it.’

The answer, to Maida no less a surprise than the fact, was coolly given between the uninterrupted strokes of a well-practised player.

‘I never knew anything like the *sang froid* of that girl, Isabel,’ was Maida’s comment upon the transaction, when they met an hour later; ‘only fancy going to call Peter out of the study, and before luncheon time, for a mere game! Neither you nor I should have had the daring.’

And then they both laughed; but in Isabel’s laugh there was admiration, in Maida’s almost dislike; and love was here, as it generally is, the better judge. Beneath all that was frivolous and commonplace in Caroline Veyse, there was a good honest heart, and a shrewd practical intellect.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ah ! pendant longtemps encore la passion que l'on ressent rend impossible de croire qu'on ait cessé d'intéresser l'objet de sa tendresse. Il semble que l'on éprouve un sentiment qui doit se communiquer ; il semble qu'on ne soit séparé que par une barrière qui ne vient point de sa volonté ; qu'en lui parlant, en le voyant, il ressentira le passé, il retrouvera ce qu'il a éprouvé ; que des cœurs qui se sont tout confiés, ne sauraient cesser de s'entendre.

MADAME DE STAËL.

ALL this time Maida's dearest hope was on its death-bed, nearly at its last gasp, but not extinct. She *could* not believe that all the love Cyril used to feel for her exclusively had receded from its old shores, and poured its warm current in quite another direction. Whatever had appeared like it was surely but a temporary diversion ; it could not be that the slight love of a girl would have more charm for him than hers, merely because she did not hesitate to express what for years the delicacy of her own high spirit had kept secret. For so stood the difference between them in her thought. Heaven would not allow such cruel injustice ; so Maida

assured herself, and Cyril would yet be hers, and feel thankful that he had not thrown himself away on a mere child at the bidding of idle fancy. If when he next came back Isabel could be out of the way, no doubt his love would return to the old channel.

Foolish woman! When feelings can be thus retrieved, the dew-drop which falls from a shaken rose may lift itself again from the ground, and fix once more on its petal.

Cyril often wrote to her, often spoke, in his letters, of the delightful time they had last spent together; and if she could have extracted from them but a little flavour of his once ardent affection for her individual self, she would, but she could not: it was no longer possible.

'Miss Crewe,' 'your sweet little friend,' 'my fair antagonist,' were ever-occurring expressions, and sometimes even more direct mention of her. 'A lady came on board with the admiral, whose eyes reminded me a little of your Isabel's;' and it did not escape Maida's observation that his *yours* had been written in over the preceding word as a correction.

And then so many needless messages to her! Those must be read out *verbatim*. To report every casual sentence in which she was named seemed to

Maida an arduous work of supererogation, which she wished it was possible to omit. For she *felt*, though she would not suffer herself to *think*, how inexpressibly delightful it was to Isabel to find herself thus frequently remembered by her hero in the far distance. But every letter Maida got from him caused her deeper pain. The old letters of the dead who loved us dearly and may still love, do notadden us so much as new ones full of affectionate terms from hearts that evidently love no longer as they used. For love lost on *this* side of the grave Imagination has no Hades.

It was almost summer time, the end of May, that Isabel went to the Veyses to spend a few days with her friend. The visit was to have taken place long before, but had been again and again put off on account of Isabel's health, an obstinate cough having kept her prisoner indoors for several weeks together.

Three days after she left Peter found Cyril's name in the list of naval promotions given in his newspaper. 'Hurrah! what a lucky fellow he is, Maida! Just as he begins to feel his station dull he is made full captain; that's through Sir Archibald Maxwell's interest, I suspect: he said his father was working it well for him.'

'But Cyril hardly needs any interest beyond his own merits, does he?' replied Maida, all aglow inwardly at the thought of his quick return.

They lingered over breakfast as long as people like to linger when a subject of joyous interest is under discussion; and when Maida went off to her daily avocations, and Peter to his, it was with more distraction of thought than was usual to either that each set to work.

There was a kind of electrical freshness in the air that day, after a heavy thunder-storm at night. All was calm and fresh: the ring of peony petals shed on the lawn since daybreak, lay undisturbed around each massive plant; and the pure blossom of the syringa looked even more firm and freshly sweet than usual, as Maida, writing at the window, put down her pen ever and anon to look at the happy garden brightness, and felt almost a new spring of hope in herself while she gazed on the revival of the outer world.

She was writing to Mrs. Wakeman, not a frequent correspondent of hers, but one to whom a letter was due because she had not yet answered her question about Isabel's going abroad with the Wakemans that summer. It had been vaguely talked about for some little time, but what Isabel

herself really wished it had not been easy to discover. Perhaps being rather out of health made her undecided; but at one hour she would speak of the plan with positive repugnance, at another as if she was inclined to accept it with pleasure.

While Maida wrote, Peter came into the room with a little note open in his hand, complaining loudly at its contents. It was from Lady Veysé, who had written to ask him to forgive a short invitation, and to ride over to dinner that evening, since the day was so fine, and it was dear Caroline's birthday. 'Much *that* has to do with it!' he exclaimed; 'some other guest has disappointed them, and she wants me to fill up the gap.'

Though he complained, there was in his manner a substratum of satisfaction at being treated as a friend more than as a neighbour only, which gave to his murmurs the unmistakable accent of good humour. In the absorption of her own mind Maida noticed nothing beyond the bare fact of his meaning to dine that day at the Veyses'.

'Oh, that is very convenient, as it happens! I wanted to get a note to dear Isabel—or, what would be better still, to get you to tell her, *vivâ voce*, that since she went I have been thinking over the Wakesmans' plan, and am come to the conclusion that it

would be a thousand pities for her not to go. You see she does not lose that troublesome little cough, and for some time we have both noticed a want of tone and energy about her. Nothing could be better than a few months abroad: don't you think so?"

"If she wished it herself."

"Oh, she *would* wish it if you told her that we both advised her to go."

"But I don't quite see what need there is for settling it all now in such a hurry: why not wait till she is at home again, and you can talk it over with her?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Peter, what has a little hurried me is the news we got this morning. I do not think we are justified in throwing her and Cyril so much together again; and, of course, he will be coming home at once, and, equally of course, he will think this the first place he must come to."

"I see," said Peter, dubiously assenting; and then, after beating a little tattoo on the table beside him, in musing silence—"but supposing they were to meet again here, and they were seriously to like each other—which seems to me not unlikely—where's the harm? I don't quite see why we are bound to take any pains to prevent it?"

‘ You surprise me, Peter ! You surely have not forgotten all the cautions you repeated to me from Mr. Wakeman’s mouth. Seeing our poor cousin is exactly the fortuneless man he was in such terror of for Isabel, it seems to me scarcely honourable on our part——’

She had now struck the right key. Peter’s pride took the alarm, and he immediately saw more discretion in his sister’s forecast than with an unbiassed judgment he could discern. ‘ True,’ he replied, ‘ and not meeting here just this time need not make any *serious* difference if there is the attachment you suspect.’

‘ But now you jump to a conclusion as quick as any woman. *I* never spoke of attachment; I was considering the case *entirely* from Mr. Wakeman’s point of view. Of course, I don’t pretend to judge of your responsibilities; I only tell you what appears to me most judicious under the circumstances.’

‘ And I believe you are right. I will talk to Isabel this evening about going, if I can get her to myself.’

‘ But be careful not to speak of Cyril’s promotion. It is just as well she should not hear of it : she never looks at the newspapers, and will be none the wiser unless we tell her. I really am a little afraid of any

excitement for her till she is stronger; I was just saying so to Mrs. Wakeman; but I think 'she added, slackening the rapidity of her tone during the last sentence, 'that if this visit does her good, she had better go to the Wakemans at Brighton for a week or two before they start. Tell her, please, that I have interested motives in proposing to get her out of the house quickly,—that the servants will give me no peace if I delay the grand spring cleaning any longer. *You* must take her to Brighton, and then I shall have the coast clear for brooms and paint and whitewash.'

She spoke laughing, but her assumed smile was very superficial. How can real gladness be in a heart that is hiding guilt by a specious semblance of well-doing? She had reached that perilous crisis when good principles may be adduced in justification of a bad motive. She did truly feel anxious about Isabel's health, and averse to over-excitement in one so delicate and easily agitated; but her fears in this special instance arose from self-interest. Of the one she spoke strongly, persuasively, as people can speak of their *right* feelings long after these have become corrupt and blended with what is wrong; of the other, how could she speak, who would not even allow herself to acknowledge it in thought?

Did the old fairy stories of mighty enchanters typify the mysteries of influence? The thraldom of one human being to another, ever so unwilling to establish it, is not less irresistible or less strange.

As soon as Isabel heard that Maida really thought it advisable for her to travel with the Wakemans, she began to like the scheme herself—wrote to give her pleased consent, and returned to Maplehurst full of projects for making it thoroughly enjoyable. ‘If it was but possible for you and Mr. Hatton to come too,’ she said to Maida, ‘it would be perfectly delightful.’

But the morning she left Maplehurst, Nelson had even more kisses and a more convulsive hug of affection than Maida, for the dog took toll for his master.

CHAPTER XIV.

And so I thought I will away, nor linger here alone,
To vex my heart out, like a ghost that makes an idle moan
About the place where joy was once and is for ever flown.

DORA GREENWELL.

NOT long after Isabel's departure, Cyril's letter, announcing his immediate return, reached Maplehurst. He wrote in his highest spirits—the Black-Sea Station was dull—promotion well timed—the prospect of seeing them all again most delightful. Maida and Miss Crewe were told to order new walking boots, for he intended to give them plenty of exercise if the summer was not too hot for it. Just a week after Isabel had reached Manheim, he was entering the hall, where almost his first glance went to the little hat with the blue ribbon round it that Isabel used in the garden, and which still hung on the peg beside Maida's. She and her brother and the enraptured dog were at once beside him, lavishing their warmest greetings; but where was Isabel?

'I hope Miss Crewe is not ill!' he said to Peter, as they passed into the dining-room.

‘ Better, thank you, the last time we heard of her.’

‘ Heard of her! you don’t mean to say she has gone?’

‘ Yes; did not Maida tell you? She went with the Wakemans to Germany. How long is it, Maida? About a week or ten days since, I think.’

‘ Since you knew of my promotion then?’

‘ Oh yes, a long while.’

Cyril flung from him the bulky paws of poor Nelson who was still fawning upon him, and made no remark; and Maida tried not to have heard in terrible distinctness each word that made her flinch. And after a pause, conversation ran upon other themes pretty freely: but Cyril was not quite himself; he seemed apt to contradict, ready to find fault, and unable to relish congratulations.

‘ I shall get another ship as soon as ever I can,’ he replied when Maida spoke of his good fortune in coming to England for the summer. And when Peter said, ‘ No such hurry for that surely,’ his almost surly tone as he answered, ‘ I’d quite as lief be afloat again at once,’ told one of his listeners everything. But still she *would* not accept the true meaning of her perception. Quite apart from the love she had cherished so long, lay the impediment

of a strong will. This being in her nature singularly powerful from its clear and prompt exercise, she suffered to an unusual degree when habitual wishes were thwarted ; and now facts ran counter to a wish so rooted and passionate that it amounted to intensest volition. She could not yet resign herself to the anguish of its defeat, and in the blindness of desperation began indirectly to upbraid.

‘ You cannot pay off the heart of an old friend, Cyril ! ’ she ejaculated in a reproachful tone the day after his return, when he had been pacing restlessly up and down the drawing-room during a ten minutes’ length of silence, without appearing even to notice Maida’s presence.

‘ I’m a brute,’ he replied, flinging himself on the chair beside her ; ‘ but *don’t* blame me ; you do not know how unhappy I am.’

But she guessed, and well knew why. If she had but sacrificed self *then*, once for all, with a mighty wrench of resigning, she could have avoided the tragedy of more lives than one. The opportunity stared her in the face, and pity for two other hearts smote hers ; but self-pity overcame compassion, and bribed the servile judgment to reassert its sophistries. ‘ Whatever he feels, it is not right to promote such an attachment *here*.’

Alas ! for how many a wrong is that formula allowed to stand sponsor ! And so Maida went on with her pretence of *not* perceiving his drift ; and taking a lighter tone, rallied him on laziness. ‘ Why not read aloud to me ? ’ she said, ‘ since we cannot make the rain leave off ; or shall we sing ? ’

‘ Oh no, thank you. I ’ve ‘not the slightest inclination—everything looks so horribly neat and orderly now—when I was here last, the room looked more inhabited somehow. I ’ll go and find the Bradshaw, for I mean to-morrow to run up to town, and show myself at the Admiralty. Just as well as kicking my heels here ; don ’t you think so ? ’ And without waiting for an answer he went out of the room.

It was true then, what she had often resentfully fancied, her own virtues even were less charming in his estimation than the faults of Isabel. Her very untidiness (incurable as Maida knew it to be) was cited by him thus as a grace ! As she mused upon the contrast, there was a coldness and severity in her feelings that caused another aching surprise. How altered she felt ! the inevitable effect of time, which turns pith into wood in vegetables, had turned natural softness of disposition into stern composure, quite as natural just then. For, ‘ if *I* had shown my

preference a year or two ago with half *her* unreserve, this change would never have been,' was the irritating thought that hardened her heart against Isabel. In her presence such irritations subsided, but when she was absent, they stung with the force and injustice of imagination.

The day that Cyril applied at the Admiralty was fortunate: he was at once appointed to supersede a captain invaliding from the West Indies, about a year before his ship would be out of commission; and the day after, when Maida got a hurried note from him to tell her this, and to say that he should not return, Isabel, by an odd chance, was first acquainted with the fact of his promotion. Her eye had been caught by his name in a newspaper some weeks old, that was wrapped round a music book of Miss Wake-man's. 'Is it possible? Can there be no mistake?' she asked herself in a tumult of surprise and agitating hope. 'Surely they would have told me if it was true.'

Poor child! What an eager letter of veiled excitement was that which Maida got a few days later—Maida, whom she was so envying for being safe at home, ready for Captain Rennie's return at any hour—Maida, whose unhappiness now was beyond anything *her* simple heart could imagine; who was

now fully aware that half her old being had fallen to the ground cold and dead, and quite beyond recovery ; but she would not stoop to heed the lifeless thing, and only pushed on through the day's tangle of petty cares with a sort of blind resolution. All that was left of her determined upon forgetfulness and scornful indifference. She had that on her conscience which made looking back almost more dreadful than looking forward to a life unloved by Cyril. It was a most gloomy time outwardly, during such cold rainy weather as July often brings : everything in the garden looked steeped in wet, as if nature had gone to sleep drenched with tears. Clinging damp stole in from the outdoors world to hushed and fireless rooms, and all the birds were silent.

CHAPTER XV.

They are the silent griefs that cut the heart-strings.

JOHN FORD.

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year.
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen,
What old December barenness everywhere !
And yet this time removed was summer's time !

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS.

As soon as she could do so, without exposing to Mrs. Wakeman her real reason for wishing to return, Isabel came back to Maplehurst, though she knew that Captain Rennie had sailed. With short and dry answers Maida had met her tormenting anxiety about his movements in writing. Isabel trusted that she would be more communicative when they were again together ; but was disappointed, and felt from the first hour of meeting that Maida was, for some reason or other, determined to avoid the subject. There was always in her face, when Isabel ventured to approach it, a kind of remoteness from anything like sympathy—a studied rigidity of expression while she spoke to her of him, which wanted

no further articulation to imply, ‘What can *my* cousin or his concerns possibly be to *you*? ’

Isabel was diffident by nature, and extremely sensitive to the opinion of those she loved, whether favourable or the reverse: besides a secret wearing grief made her now additionally timid; she shrank back therefore into deeper and sadder reserve after each vain effort to break the ice; and gave up every hope of understanding what had happened either in Cyril’s heart or Maida’s mind. Could *he* have forgotten her? Nothing looked like it, until this sudden eagerness for getting immediate service; and oh! was it not more cruelly probable that he believed *her* changed—*her* ready to forget, since her actions looked so like it? If she might but write one word to explain, or send ever so little a message! Through Maida she could not; but one day alone with her guardian, she stumbled into the business with precipitate and momentary boldness.

‘Mr. Hatton,’ she said, as he was helping her to tie up a wind-beaten rose-tree in her border, ‘I hope your cousin knew that I did not *want* to miss his visit here; it may have seemed a little odd, rude I mean, to go away just then; but Maida never told me——’

‘Well, my dear, Cyril was here so short a time

that really I cannot tell you what he thought—take care ! you are letting that branch go !—he only stayed over two nights, and was not himself all the time.'

'I *wish you* would tell him,' she began with a wistful glance at Peter's lips that now held a piece of bass, 'that I was *advised* to go when I did, and had no idea——'

'To be sure, to be sure ; why we almost sent you. We can quite explain that some day, you know. Here, Maida, just reach me that taller stake that lies against the tool house.' Maida had come up unobserved, and seeing her, Isabel blushed scarlet. Of *one* thing she was fully convinced, that Maida had in some way obstructed her dearest hopes ; but she had such habitual faith in her affection and far superior wisdom, that even now she believed there were supposed good reasons for all she had done, though the relief of knowing what they were was denied to her. The only thing that changed the current of her usual feelings was the suspicion that Maida had knowingly connived at Captain Rennie misunderstanding her own line of conduct ; and Peter's last words, 'we almost sent you,' woke up smouldering resentment which rankled long in her heart, without finding any just means of escape.

When first a very soft and tender nature feels the

commotion of such anger, it suffers more terribly than any firmer mould of character can conceive. It feels not only alienated from another heart, but at war with itself, and embittered by remembrance of its previous trust.

On Maida's side, the pangs of remorse were beginning to make her see that she had worse to suffer than a total loss of hope. She could not steel herself against Isabel's altered look ; there was a languor in all her movements, a want of interest in every occupation, that proved either serious indisposition or a no less serious disturbance of her peace. And her cough continued. At first the little sound brought a kind of relief to Maida ; it allowed her to believe that *only* health was impaired ; but as the weeks went on it began to worry her.

' My love,' she said, one day as they sat at work out of doors, on a brilliant autumn evening, ' I don't like that teasing little cough ; those two months in Germany do not seem to have done you any good at all.'

' *Good !* no, only harm, dreadful harm. I wish I had never, never gone away ! ' and then, feeling as if she had rendered herself liable to a searching enquiry as to what she meant, she added in a less tragical tone, ' I have never felt well since that spring illness ;

and I am *so* thin now, everything I wear seems too loose.'

' You are very thin, my dearest. I tell you what, we must take more vigorous measures for getting back your strength. Suppose you begin new milk regularly morning and evening, just to please me.'

' If you like.'

There was now seldom any smile on her face when she answered Maida. Her manner as well as everything else was changed. Peter obscurely felt this—noticed now and then that something seemed amiss between the two women, and tried, as good-humoured men often will, to trifle away the impression of discomfort he could neither understand nor alleviate. He told himself that women will be fanciful about insignificant matters—that the best way of dealing with such petty squabbles was to laugh and pass on. But elaborated indifference, like every other acquired negative, costs more than it is worth: and in order to secure it for his own peace (the real desideratum of his mind) he had carefully to smother the suspicion that Isabel's happiness had been wrecked. He saw that the child of his best friend was suffering, was in some way less happy with his sister; 'but what,' he thought, 'can *I* do? One cannot watch the girl all day, or question her about

her moods. Girls have their own inscrutable whimsies, and it is no use trying to cure them by argument.' So he took an opposite course, to his mind more suitable, and forgot all about her in the engrossing interest of his studies. He was, indeed, so much taken up with the essay he was preparing on 'The Deceivableness of the Human Mind,' that to suspect his own of selfishness in the matter naturally did not occur to him ; and when he heard Isabel cough as she sat under the birch tree before his study window, he only gave the fact attention enough to induce him to call out as loud as he could without rising : ' I say, Isabel, don't sit out too long ; these autumn days are rather treacherous.'

' Treacherous as the hope of this time last year ! ' thought Maida, gathering up her work too to follow her docile friend. To her the entranced September day was terribly beautiful ; with her sense of the wrong she had done quickening every day, each particular of external beauty was a fresh disturbance ; even the bee asleep on the German aster beside her, and the little golden drips of yellow sprinkling here and there the light foliage of the birch tree overhead.

CHAPTER XVI.

I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me.

TENNYSON.

Some word there was
* * * * *
I would forget it fain;
But oh! it presses to my memory,
Like damned, guilty deeds to sinners' minds.

SHAKESPARE.

IT was from the lips of Caroline Veyse that the Hattons first took the alarm. After a long absence from home, she came to Maplehurst to spend Isabel's birthday with her; and the change her fresh eyes perceived, startled her first into an outcry of surprise, then into deep sighing, and, as Mr. Hatton accompanied her to the carriage at night, into words of earnest warning.

‘ Oh, Mr. Hatton, what *is* the matter with poor dear Isabel? She looks *very* ill, and is not half herself. Why don't you get advice about her before winter comes, and before—— She told me she thought she should never be better.’

Caroline Veyse never scrupled one moment to say just what she thought, or to urge what she wished. Before Peter had shaken hands with her for a last good night at the carriage door, he had promised the very next day to take Isabel to Southampton, and to consult its most able physician. ‘*Much* better take her to London *at once*,’ she replied, and drew up the window conclusively. He stopped to consider how he should open his designs in the drawing-room, before he re-entered ; and when he did, attempted to do so in a light and jocose way—throwing the weight of anxiety on the hyper-solicitude of a bosom friend, and not making much of facts. But to his dismay and Maida’s secret anguish, Isabel answered very gravely, ‘ I have many times lately thought that I ought to see some doctor, though I don’t believe it will be much use. Let me go to London, please. I do not want to see Southampton again.’

The day but one after this, they were all three on their way to London. The opinion of the celebrated Dr. —— was honestly given after careful and repeated examinations. There was mischief both in the lungs and in the action of the heart ; the *greatest* care to avoid all mental excitement was enjoined, and wintering in the south of France advised. If the system could recover tone, the incipient malady

might still be arrested ; Miss Crewe was still young, and that was in her favour, &c. &c.

Maida listened to this verdict with feelings that no language could describe ; but the thought she kept uppermost that day, by sheer force of will, was that *after all* it was a happy thing that Cyril had not gone further ; he might have entailed much unhappiness on himself if he had seen more of her ; she was sadly delicate ; and *it* was in the family—that dreadful unnamed *it* which so often invades English homes with the fairest looks and most insidious advances.

Plans for wintering abroad were at once set on foot, and meanwhile the usual game of hope kept up both by Mr. Hatton and his sister. Isabel was in an anxious state of health undoubtedly, but the time had not come when this could be confessed by those to whom she was most dear ; they still *spoke* cheerfully and aloud of the restorative influence of a milder air, the self-repairing forces of youth. Their hopes spoke out clearly enough ; but a cold strong fear stood in the background of every heart and was speechless. It seemed content to be silent, as long as the prattle of less discerning feelings went on ; it would have time enough to speak, and attention enough would be given to its least whisper soon.

At Isabel's earnest request Caroline Veyse was to be of their party : her parents reluctantly consented to part with her, promising to spend a good part of the winter at Mentone also. Peter and Maida were only too glad to take with them one in whose society the invalid seemed to find more pleasure than from any other source. Perhaps the very frank plainness of her commoner sort of nature made it a wholesome tonic to the sensitive girl ; or it may have been only as she said when pleading with Lady Veyse for the indulgence, ‘ You see Lina is nearer my own age than Miss Hatton, and I know she will be a very prudent chaperone for anybody ; but she is very, very kind to me always, too,’ she added, as the sickly smile with which she had said those last words passed from her wan face. Even to herself, Isabel continued to call Maida’s conduct really kind, and often said to others that she was so with anxious emphasis ; as if *some one* had appeared incredulous of her assertion. Her shattered nerves could ill bear the least suspicion of a contrary opinion ; and this was her gentle nature’s instinctive mode of self-defence.

And now, in very truth, Maida’s tenderness and devotion to her comfort was almost equal to her wretchedness. Now, at last, in spite of her will *not*

to see, she saw and knew what she had done. She did not say to herself in so many words that she had half killed Isabel, but she felt it with irrepressible conviction. Her highly cultivated mind offered a hundred facets for the reflection of this terrible idea ; with less varied powers of thought she would have been spared many a reiteration of its misery ; but with her it came back from every side of an affluent nature, stinging her alike through associations, sensuous images, and literary tastes. If for a little while, leaving Isabel, she went into the fields, now dim with the faded bent grass of a previous summer, and listened to the hoarse music of rooks alternately soaring and settling again on the boughs of bronzing oak trees—memory at once restored her to the habits, the hopes, and feelings of last year's September. Leaving that happy time for a later retrospect, she tried hard to remember exactly what she had said to influence the fate of that poor girl languishing under disease, and that unpitied sorrow which now she judged it hazardous to her very life to unveil.

What, then, had she said ? Nothing so very dreadful, so far as the words went ; not an unkind syllable, not a harsh tone could her panic-stricken mind recall ; the sin was far deeper than any human witness

could go for taking cognisance of it ; it made no scar in the smooth surface of her virtuous character ; and yet she knew that a handful of poison deftly scattered into Isabel's cup had been scarcely less of a murder : and *that* she could have confessed to a fellow man, and thereby somewhat eased the laden heart ; but *this* how could she ! It was not detection that she feared ; of that there was no chance ; no danger even of poor Isabel's raising an accusation against her. So far her conduct had been a masterpiece of skill, but the torment of living self-detected before a Holy Judge was horrible enough. To Him she now confessed her guilt day by day in agonies of compunction, but no penitence could efface its branding mark on her soul. She had heard that the human heart was so deep that one could bury in its inmost recesses many an intolerable vestige of a guilty past, and appease the soul by good done in the present ; and thus she strove at times to press back into oblivion this haunting record of secret wrongs. In vain ! for a conscience once fully wakened there is no opiate ; do what she would, she could never many hours together forget that little quarter of an hour in Peter's study, when she had said, 'I cannot tell,' in answer to his enquiry about Isabel's feelings ; and thought she had so cleverly left

the onus of responsibility with her unsuspecting brother, while the real motive gnawed her heart, and applied every subordinate means to its gratification.

Sometimes, when speaking to him about Isabel, she would break out in strong terms of self-reproach, as the one by whose cruel neglect her illness was occasioned ; and, while he replied with tender brotherly kindness, and gravely soothing words, a mocking fiend within seemed to stab her by reiterating that word ‘neglect’ in every tone of exulting derision.

‘ You don’t know all I have to reproach myself for,’ she said ; but he, not having a guess at her real ground of remorse, only took it as a fresh proof of the almost morbid delicacy of his excellent sister’s conscience.

The necessary activity that preparations for long absence demanded, was now her best resource ; and she was glad when they were actually starting ; though it wrung her heart to see how long Isabel kept a wasted hand on Nelson’s head before they drove off, and to hear her low-voiced remark, when Caroline was saying something to Mr. Hatton on the box of the carriage, ‘ I suppose, Maida, they will be sure to forward any letter from the West Indies.’

CHAPTER XVII.

Few—none—find what they love, or could have loved,
Though accident, blind contact, and the strong
Necessity of loving, have removed
Antipathies ; but to recur, ere long,
Envenomed with irrevocable wrong ;
And Circumstance, that unspiritual god,
And miscreator, makes and helps along
Our coming evils with a crutch-like rod,
Whose touch turns hope to dust—the dust we all have trod.

BYRON.

IT is not right to dwell in such a narrative as this on the gradual heart-sickening advances of the fatal disease so well known, so justly dreaded, by half the families of England. Isabel was in a decline when she left its shores, and even then so convinced that she should not recover, that it was only to please her companions that she ever talked of hope. In her case the delusive malady was without one of its most common symptoms. But Peter and Maida could not resign themselves to the prospects on which the invalid herself had for a long time fixed a calm and submissive mind. A week or two after they had reached Mentone, they attributed all want of im-

provement in her health to the effects of a tiring journey ; later in the winter they fancied an unusually severe season had increased her cough ; when spring came they called it a trying time of the year for anyone ; but when May was past, and Isabel, wasted to a shadow, could hardly utter, with half the vocal emphasis she intended, her mournful entreaty, ‘ Let me go back to England ; I should not like my body left here in a strange land ; ’ then they knew that all earthly hope must be exchanged for total resignation.

When Maida began to believe the end near, her heart felt quite broken, and she envied the dying girl. All through the winter her conduct had been wholly ruled by devotedness to Isabel’s least wishes —her soul quite given up to self-humiliation. Even her unobservant brother could not help being struck by the change, and noticing it—with fresh admiration at what woman’s love for another could effect,—blamed in himself any little spurts of regret at losing so many months, as he called it, because they were taken from the pursuit of his life’s main object—study.

Far too generous to grudge the sacrifice for a moment, he yet occasionally felt very acutely the self-denials it involved. He would not admit that

he did so to his sister ; but in conversation with Miss Veyse, the feeling now and then transpired. He was surprised, but not altogether displeased, by her mode of meeting his complaints : instead of pitying, she blamed ; with her usual dauntless good sense she used to reply, ‘ If I were you I should consider such an interruption quite a God-send, Mr. Hatton ; for really you seemed getting to think life was only given you for reading and writing books,—very well in their way, no doubt,—though I am often sick of hearing mamma go on about them ; but it’s ten times better to be able to do some good to a human creature in a more direct way. Don’t you think so ? If you do, please hold this skein of silk, for I want to finish poor Isabel’s purse ; it’s for you, I believe, and she finds netting too much of an effort now.’

Her ascendency over his far wider intellect was daily increasing ; and he yielded to it with something between amusement and respect. Maida looked on amazed. Where she often hesitated, or even stumbled from anxious affection, Caroline coolly walked over the ground. At first she thought the process too bold, then graceful, and at last a much better one every way than her own. Yet her line of action with Peter had more of consideration in it—more of modest reverence for his powers, and greater

intrinsic weight from depth of thought and fineness of feeling; why, with such additional excellences, she did not succeed the better of the two, was a puzzle to her. How could such advantages fail to tell upon a man like Peter? Just because they were superior advantages, giving to her manner the unconscious sense of superiority which is in most people so repelling. For, in general, negative characteristics are more liked than positive ones; they are less *gênant* and better understood. There is, besides, together with the positive virtues, one vice which often clouds every charm—a solicitous pride; and, with all imaginable delicacy of consideration and tenderness for other people, a never-sleeping vigilance over the dignity of self.

If one tried to give the chief fault of Maida's character in one word, it would be that she was *duty proud*. Judge, then, what she suffered now from an increasing and incommunicable remorse. Her own ideas of self were for ever broken up; hardly could she persuade herself now that she had any sort of virtue, that she was not in every way ignoble and worthy of disdain. Could she have shown her wounds to any human being, human pity might have done something to allay the smart of them, human love said something to re-establish self-esteem.

But there was only One to whom she could expose all ‘the dreadful past,’ and from Him she obtained the balm of humblest contrition. For the anguish of total self-abhorrence there is no other remedy. ‘Who teacheth like Him?’ While He leads us to loathe the corpse of self-love, He shows us more and more of the Light and Life that can never be loved too much.

In a hundred little ways it was perceptible to Isabel that her friend’s inner being had been subjected to great revolution. Her sweet-tempered readiness to be second in the sick room, and to allow the younger friend all the rights and privileges of a dearest companion, was marvellous to the invalid. But a few months back she would have looked, if she had not spoken, infinite ridicule at the idea of a rattle-brain like Caroline Veyse being of any real use as a nurse. Now, in every possible way, she gave her precedence; so much so that Isabel had often to press her to be more with her.

‘Don’t go, dearest,’ she said one day as Maida was leaving the room with the promise to send Caroline. ‘Do not go, unless you dislike being with me. Caroline is very nice and dear, but she cannot read to me as you do ; she reads a chapter in the Bible like a proclamation—so quick and inexpressively. I wish you would be reader in general.’

'I shall be thankful for the appointment, Isabel. I did not like to offer, for I feel as if everyone did things better than myself.'

'A mistake,' said Isabel, tenderly, and then turned her head away, for she saw tears starting in Maida's eyes. Her expression of self-distrust was no exaggeration of what she felt; it now brought into suspicion even her once much valued judgment. On one point she could come to no decision in her own mind, and was obliged to bring it with all its associations of pain into discussion with her brother. She was more and more persuaded that Cyril's love of Isabel had been fully returned, and to her it seemed doubtful whether even now he should not be told of this. He had not written for several months; in vain Aunt Judith wrote her letters of rasping enquiry, intimating that of course the man who could forget his own father's anxiety for his welfare, would yet be careful to satisfy a cousin's. No one had heard from Cyril since the autumn; and unless he was ill, something was certainly very much affecting his mind, or he would not be so indifferent to home friends.

'Poor Isabel so often asks me if I have heard,' Maida was telling her brother; 'surely it would be as well to let him know what we fear has been making her so unhappy; a message from him might—'

‘Not to be thought of for an instant!’ cried Peter, ‘in her state, when the least agitation would most likely be fatal. I wonder you can dream of such a rash attempt. No, let the subject be entirely avoided, if possible; if we judged ill before in not promoting the attachment, we should do worse in now doing anything to keep it alive. Besides, why should the poor fellow’s mind be so cruelly disturbed when it is too late? The best thing he can do is to forget.’

Maida did not think so; to her woman’s heart the fact of being loved seemed more of a boon to communicate, even at the brink of the grave, than to the masculine nature it was likely to appear. Nor did she suppose it possible that Cyril was even beginning to forget.

But while she thus wavered between her own convictions and those of her brother’s, Cyril ended the uncertainty in a way that surprised them both. He wrote, not to Maida, but to Peter, briefly to inform him that he was married—to a widow lady, who had been the kindest nurse possible during the weeks he had been laid up ashore with yellow fever in Demerara.

‘Under Providence,’ he wrote, ‘I owe *my life* to this *excellent* woman; and I feel that, in devoting

myself to guard the happiness of *hers*, I am doing the least I can to show my sense of gratitude.'

As he read these words, Peter broke out into loud laughter. 'Cyril all over!' he said: but Maida, who lent over his shoulder, was mute, and her eye hurried on to the postscript. 'Maida is sure to ask, as women always do, "Who *was* she?" She was a *Mrs. Jones*; her husband a West India planter, very rich, and he left two boys;' then with only one dividing dash came, 'I am extremely concerned to receive such sad accounts of Miss Crewe.'

'Shall we tell her?' asked Maida, white and cold with intense agitation.

'Not unless she finds out that we have heard, and then you must—tell her everything, no half measures do in such cases; but only think of Cyril and a *Mrs. Jones* for a bride—fat, no doubt, and rich, and masterful, probably: and two boys. Good Heavens! what people *can* come to! And now, I suppose, his time out there is nearly up, and he will be bringing home this charmer. Well! I always knew the poor fellow had a soft heart, but I confess I never expected him to succumb to a widow.'

He began to laugh again so heartily that Maida was glad to leave him alone to enjoy the jest by himself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Home ? it shall be that home indeed,
Where tears attend and shadows lead
The steps of man's return.
Home ! woe is me, no home I need
Except the urn !

J. RUSKIN'S 'LAST SONG OF ARION.'

' You have got the letter ! ' Isabel said, when Maida went up to her room ; ' sit down by me and tell me all, or perhaps I may see it.'

She spoke in a hoarse whisper, and was so flushed that her friend tried to gain time for consideration by a trifling answer. ' Yes, dear, we have heard from Cyril ; but how could you know it ? '

' Oh, because I told Hannah to look at the stamps of all the letters, and tell me what colour and shape came. But how is he ? and is he happy ? '

' He has been very ill—his life in danger with fever, but he had quite recovered when he wrote : he is very sorry to hear how ill you are. Peter has the letter.'

' But,' said Isabel, fixing a terrible brightness of gaze upon her, ' there was something in it you have

not yet told me—that you don't like telling. *Is* he in any trouble, or going on dangerous service ? '

Scarcely knowing what she said or did in the perturbation of her mind, Maida snatched up the Bible which lay open on the table beside Isabel's sofa, and exclaimed, ' Oh ! this is the verse I was wanting to remind you of—" They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels which are in heaven." So you see that *must* be infinitely happier—but Cyril—yes, he is married.'

And there the last curb of self-control gave way, and leaning her head against Isabel's pillow, she broke into a flood of tears—tears that *would* not be kept in, choking sobs, that for a few seconds prevented the sound of quicker, harder breathing at her side being noticed: for the long force she had put upon her feelings nature now claimed revenge; and it seemed as much then as she could possibly do to hold the hand of Isabel, and press it with exculpatory fondness.

Isabel was comparatively calm, her lips trembled slightly, and her dilated eyes and white cheeks told of some strong revulsion of feeling, but she only said, ' Poor Maida ! don't mind me, darling ; I understand now.'

It was an effort so to speak, and as soon as she

could gently withdraw her hand from Maida's grasp, it was to press it against a heart fluttering fearfully. This gesture restored the other to a sense of duty, and at once rising to ring the bell, she said in a tolerably composed voice—

'I will send down for the letter, for I know you must be wishing to hear all just as he tells it. Take this quieting draught now, dearest Isabel, before you read it.'

'Oh, thank you, I am better, do not think again of me.'

'I cannot make out whether he is happy or not. He does not say a word about that.'

The letter was read, without the least apparent quiver of emotion; but for the rest of the day Isabel was so alarmingly ill, that the intention of slowly travelling homewards the next week seemed for the time unlikely to be carried out. The only home Maida thought her able to reach was that from which there is no more going out. But Caroline kept on repeating for their comfort, 'She has set her heart on getting to England, and depend upon it she will.'

Sir Robert and Lady Veyse were now in the place, their daughter was with her friend only part of the day, much to Maida's relief, who found

her only comfort in being day and night with the sufferer.

Peter felt it incumbent on him to escort Miss Veyse home to her father's lodgings every day ; she was such a child in his estimation when they first became intimate, and the two-and-twenty years' difference in their respective ages, had given such a paternal tone to his manner towards her, that until just lately the thought had never crossed Maida's mind that it was possible there could be more than kindness in his feelings about the good-natured lively girl. And, meanwhile, her brother was assuring himself that he was not in love, by as many incontrovertible proofs as shy people bring forward in their own minds to establish the fact that they are not in the least uncomfortable while waiting at a stranger's door for the footman to answer the bell—proofs as clear in theory as in practice they are invalid ; for the very fact of being obliged to adduce such a long array of reasons for *not* being in love, or not being at all afraid, shows that love or fear have already made some inroads upon peace.

One evening, towards sundown, when Isabel seemed a little revived, and more inclined for talking than she had been since the news of Cyril's marriage reached them, Maida came downstairs to fetch

her workbasket, and, believing that her brother and Caroline had left the house half-an-hour before, she quite started to hear their voices as she opened the door. Caroline's came through tears, and it seemed that Peter was acting the part of a consoler, for as they stood together in the embrasure of the window, with their backs turned to the door, Peter held her hand, and his words were soothing and almost passionate in sympathy. All that Maida could distinctly hear were these, ' You share our sorrow, and such tenderness cannot but endear you to us. It is not now a fitting time to speak of future hopes ; but if so bright a hope may be entertained by one quite unworthy——' and then she would hear no more, and shutting the door after her as noiselessly as she could, she hastened back to the invalid. So it was coming to *that* after all ! ' what amazing creatures men are ! ' she said to herself ; for though spending the rest of her life with Peter was now the only shape in which it appeared at all tolerable to her imagination, she did not feel much concerned for herself when that hope also began to show signs of dissolution. As in great pain of the body the most orderly people will throw things into any corner, regardless of their right place—lost to all habitual sensibilities, so in her chronic anguish of

remorse, this thought of Peter's house having a new mistress, was by Maida set aside as a thing of little or no consequence. What did it matter what became of *her* when Cyril was married, and Isabel's sufferings at an end?

It seemed at that hour far more important to prop up the feeble frame so that she could watch the sun setting without effort—to sing the hymn she loved best at that hour—to anticipate the least wish that could be gratified.

'Not that brooch, love,' Isabel had just said, as Maida was fastening another shawl round her. 'My dear Maltese brooch. I like to use that as long as I can, and afterwards, you understand, hide it away with this silly heart, when it has quite done aching.'

The darkening sky was merciful just then to Maida, and she was glad that Isabel could not see her face—that she could speak with composure, and let the hot tears fall unperceived.

'My dearest, I will not forget.'

'I think I *shall* be able to reach England first. It is foolish, perhaps, but I feel as if I *must* before I go.'

There was an aching silence for a minute or two, which Maida broke, by saying abruptly,—

'Isabel, Isabel, can you *quite* forgive me?'

'I believe our dear Lord *does* forgive me, Maida,

and you know I could not, if I felt it hard to pardon.'

' You did once, I am sure.'

' Only now and then : just for a little time it seemed cruel ; but I kept on telling myself you had some good reason ; and I *never* guessed——' a slight pressure of the hand on which hers rested conveyed to Maida the meaning of the unfinished sentence.

' How I wish you had confided more to me ! I know too well how little I did to win such confidence, yet if you had *but* told me how far feeling had gone !'

' But dear, how *could* I, when you were so near a relation of his ? I often longed to do so, but it seemed impossible—so indelicate, and wrong too ; as bad, in some respects worse, than saying anything straight out to him.'

A sigh, that sounded more like a groan, from Maida gave assent to these words, and Isabel went on—' And then I thought it so evident that he felt for me as I did for him. I thought you and Mr. Hattton *must* have observed,—and to ask you *if* you had seen what I *knew*, was too dreadful an *exposé* of my own feelings.'

' Poor dear child ! what slow wearing wretchedness it was for you ! I don't wonder at your illness.'

‘ Oh, Maida, some days—some nights—I scarcely dare to recall now, the thought of them seems enough to make me half delirious; particularly the days when you had had a letter from him, and did not offer to show it to me, but only read out his messages as if they were like anyone else’s words. Tell me, dear, now that it does not signify in one way—*did* you think he loved me?’

‘ I am *sure* that he did.’

There was for a few seconds a terrible struggle going on in the mind of poor Isabel; but when Maida spoke again the tone of her voice brought it to an end.

‘ Isabel,’ she said, ‘ though you forgive me, do you think *God* can?’

‘ No doubt, no doubt; He only knows all that *you* suffered; and even I, directly I had the least notion of that, pitied you too much to be angry. Even before then I used to think you must be feeling extremely unhappy; for, you see, when we are happy ourselves we so want everyone else to be so too. But, dearest Maida, do not let us look back any longer. I shall wait and hope for you *both* in the home we trust I shall soon enter; and when you see him, you must tell him——’

The effort of so much speaking and the excite-

ment the subject caused, was too much for her little strength: unable to finish her sentence, a long interval of panting for breath elapsed before she spoke again. Maida was re-adjusting her pillow, and as she stooped for one more kiss on the high forehead, Isabel with her sweetest smile whispered softly, 'But all these things have ceased to be, with my desire of life!'

CHAPTER XIX.

From the storms of life
There is no landing-place here.
Destiny mocks us every moment !
The worker she hurls into the gulf ;
Takes the saintly, takes the lovely ;
Leaves the unlovely !
Everything is knotted, and will not get untangled ;
Death is at hand ; and in the distance,
Somewhere in the far-off waves of ages,
Resurrection !

KRASINKSKI, TRANSLATED BY W. H. B.

THEY were able to bring Isabel back to England ; but when they landed at Dover, it seemed quite impossible that she should travel any farther. For ten days she could not leave her bed, and when she was slightly revived, and sultry June weather made her long for air, she was only able to be drawn about in an invalid's chair for half an hour during the afternoon, and was then carried back again to her bed. Caroline had been obliged to leave her for a fortnight, and promised to return to Dover, if at the end of that time the journey homewards could not be undertaken.

One day, as Isabel was being drawn towards the East Cliff, Peter walking on one side of her chair and Maida on the other, they were startled at seeing her almost jump up, to point out a group of people coming from the jetty in their direction. ‘See! see!’ she cried, ‘it *is* he! ’

But for a moment or two neither of the others could recognise whom she meant, till she faintly added as she sunk back upon her pillow, ‘and the children! ’

And then they saw that it was indeed Cyril, only a few paces off, with a lady walking at his side; a little boy of about five years old held his hand, and a taller child followed them. Such moments of recognition as these pass in a whirl of confused feeling which admits of no verbal account. Clearly Cyril had not perceived who was approaching, for he went on listening to the lady beside him, every now and then turning round to see if the other boy kept close behind.

Peter strode on, and claimed attention while they were not yet quite near enough for Isabel to hear what passed. She and Maida could only see the long shaking of hands, and clapping of shoulders—the gestures of introduction—the laugh of the wife (for it was she), and Cyril’s hand resting with an

unmistakable air of ownership on the little curly-headed fellow who was staring up and down Peter's height.

One thought alone overpowered all others in Maida's mind then—how to prevent that meeting being too much for Isabel. But now Cyril came forward alone, and grasping her hand with a silent sympathetic clutch, he stooped down to say a few low words of greeting to the colourless girl at her side, who *could* not speak—whose lips trembled convulsively—whose hand clung to his, as if there was in its touch something that felt almost strong enough to lift her up from the gates of death. Cyril could have borne it all better than her smile; so much ‘anguish of patience,’ so much angelic sweetness of welcome, and perfectness of trust could never surely have been articulated.

Maida turned away, she would not now intervene, or listen to the words of either. Isabel's were very few; ‘you must introduce me,’ she said, ‘but not now. I must go in now, Maida!’ She felt fainting, and Cyril, as much alarmed by her looks now as he had been shocked by her whole appearance five minutes before, called Maida back from where she was standing, pretending to talk to the man who drew the carriage, and said, in his most subdued

voice, ‘I will just tell my wife not to wait for me, and then you will let me come back, and see you in to your lodgings. Do not be afraid: I will not tire her.

And so he did, in a few minutes overtaking the slowly-drawn chair.

If any of the gay throng who crowded the Parade as they passed it, had known what feelings occupied the invalid and her two attendants, they must have stopped to observe them narrowly, as people notice a funeral procession. But laughter and light talk went on as uninterruptedly as the dash of the waves below; and Cyril himself seemed to find small talk the only resource; not daring to look at Isabel, addressing Maida only as she walked between him and the chair, he spoke of all sorts of common things with well-simulated calm. He told her that he had been back some little time; that his ship had paid off at Deal, and that he waited there till his wife and her boys could arrive; that in the interval he had written several times to her at Maplehurst and wondered extremely at not getting any answer; that he still felt the weakening effects of the fever, and was at times horribly low and dyspeptic. Maida wondered at his ready flow of words. People so little understand each other, that she could not appreciate the

immense fortitude with which he restrained himself from any indulgence of feeling, even in thought ; nor guess that unless he had adopted this manner, he must have rushed away to conceal the violence of his emotion, and to conquer all alone the passionate impulse of his grief.

Isabel, too, keeping her blue eyes wide spread upon his shadow (all she could see from her reclining position), and listening to his clear voice with the languid amazement that comes over us in a wonderful dream, was equally misled, and though now and then a sudden hoarseness and abrupt change of voice told her that he *felt*, she supposed that for him the present had made ample compensation for the past, and meekly accepting the fact as an answer to her most earnest prayers for his happiness, she again and again called to mind the Psalmist's saying, ‘ Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee.’

‘ How careless of Peter ! ’ exclaimed his sister as they reached the door of their lodgings in Waterloo Crescent, ‘ he knows poor Isabel must be carried upstairs ! ’

‘ And that I was here to carry her,’ Cyril replied ; ‘ if you will permit me ? ’ he added, turning to the invalid with an air of most tender reverence.

‘I’m sorry to be so troublesome,’ was her reply; ‘but it cannot be for long; and I am no great weight now.’

She tried to smile, to conjure up a ghost of gay humour, but the sound of her voice, speaking *thus*, and *to him*, after those long cruel months of separation, overcame her, and with closed eyes and heavy tears trickling through their thick lashes, she lay on his strong arms, which trembled, but not because of her weight. To him it seemed that he was carrying a mere shadow of the beautiful form he had last seen in its delicate glow of health.

As he gently laid her down, she tried to speak again, but a ‘thank you!’ was all she could get through; while still she held his hand as if that was not all, and she could not let him go yet.

‘You must take a little jelly now, my love,’ said Maida; ‘let Cyril give it you.’

‘No, no; I must see him again; I can’t just now remember what it was —’

Quick to take the first intimation that his presence troubled her, Cyril was leaving the room after kissing her hand with a sort of hopeless delight, when again she beckoned him to her side, and mustering all her forces, said with eager accents, ‘Let me see her soon—your wife—I want to love her; and don’t

think I shall forget you where I am going. I shall — tell him what I mean, Maida,' she muttered, sinking back quite exhausted.

'I know,' Cyril answered, once more kissing her hand; and then, unable to contain himself any longer, he hurried out of her presence.

It was half an hour later, when the band outside the windows were playing their quickest and merriest tunes, that Maida found him in the room below, bent half across the table, resting his head upon his outspread arms, so as to hide the face completely. She had to speak twice before he was at all conscious of her being in the room, and when he looked up, there was a ghastly coldness of despair in its expression that made her shrink back from further intrusion.

'She has fallen into a sweet sleep,' was all she said before she left him alone again. But as she closed the drawing-room door, voices in the hall, children's voices, and a woman's, mixing with that of her brother's, told her that an invasion of guests was at hand.

'How could Peter be so thoughtless!' she said to herself, as she went downstairs to caution them about noise, and heard Mrs. Rennie speaking in full unsoftened tones.

'Thank you, Mr. Hatton; a little of Guinness's

stout will suit me better than a cup of tea ; Captain Rennie don't care much about tea, and I prefer his taking porter to anything : since his illness it suits best ; and as for Tommy here and Fred, why I think if you could let them have a mutton chop, they would do very well.'

At this point Maida confronted the portly matron, and Peter hastened to introduce, and to explain as well as he could why he had asked them to stay for tea at their lodgings. The truth was that he could not have helped doing so, unless he had been positively rude. Mrs. Rennie had, in a manner, invited herself ; first observing that no doubt the Captain was taking tea with his cousin, and then saying, after Peter had walked with her up and down the jetty till he was nearly knocked up himself, that she should like to go and look after her 'hubby,' since he did not return. The unfortunate man so designated, started to his feet as soon as the sound of her voice made itself heard in the hall, and came down just as Mrs. Rennie had settled into an easy chair by the window, and was fanning herself with a very large pocket-handkerchief. As it had to do duty apparently for Tommy also, once and again called to her side for the purpose, it was perhaps only a motherly precaution to have one so extensive ; but, sad as she

was, Maida could not help resenting the unrefined appearance of her new connection.

Peter's manner towards her had all the careful respect which such cultivated natures as his can show to woman. It was the only return he could make for the bouncing cordiality she evinced towards him ; and besides satisfying his notions of what was due to one who met him so kindly, it would serve, he hoped, as a mild check upon further outbreaks of familiarity. But Mrs. Rennie's West Indian ease of manner admitted of no such check. Maida could not converse with her ten minutes without feeling something of its contagious warmth. When she spoke to her of Isabel, the tears were so soon in Mrs. Rennie's eyes, there was such unaffected sympathy in her plain full face, such heartfelt compassion in her tone, that the spell to which Cyril had yielded was no longer a mystery.

'Miss Crewe wishes to see you, Angelina, and she begged me to ask you to see her soon,' he said, after he had listened some minutes in silence to all Maida was telling his wife.

'Dear heart ! how kind of her ! to think of her giving a thought to *me* at such a time ! to be sure I will go. Your cousin might find worse nurses than me, eh ? I could sit up this very night, and give you a rest, and indeed you look as if you wanted it.'

‘Thank you, thank you ; we have reason to be grateful for your good nursing I am sure ; but we have a regular nurse for the night. If you will allow me, I will go to Isabel now ; she may be rousing ; and before you go, I can perhaps let you know when she thinks she may be able to see you.’

‘Very good. Now, Fred, don’t let me see you taking so much meat without a morsel of bread. Papa, will you cut Tommy’s crust for him : and then, my dear, take some of this stout yourself. You look as white as a sheet. It’s all *very* sad—*very*—and I’m sure I feel for them uncommonly, but walking so long has given me quite an appetite.’

Peter had followed Maida out of the room to account for the infliction ; and having begged his guests to dispense with all ceremony, Mrs. Rennie willingly accommodated herself to circumstances, and with her two hungry little lads she set to work.

‘I have a headache, and do not *wish* for anything,’ was all she could draw from Cyril ; both she and the children knew by his manner that he would not now brook being spoken to more, and at once their voices lowered.

CHAPTER XX.

And no smile ever was smiled
But only one smile alone
(And betwixt the cradle and grave
It only once smiled can be),
That when it once is smiled,
There's an end to all misery.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

MRS. RENNIE was one of those robust natures whose reparative good sense never allows them to go far in the shades of melancholy. Even at the bedside of a dying person her tone was cheery and exhilarated; and in spite of very sincere concern for the sufferer and her relations, she stood beside Isabel's couch with an air of comfortable jolliness that looked strange in that room.

After exchanging a few words and smiles, Maida being her spokesman now and then, for shortness of breath made speaking very difficult, Isabel signed to Maida to leave the room. ‘Quite alone with her!’ she said. And when she was, she drew Mrs. Rennie nearer by the motion of her hand, and leaning her head on the soft arm that was trying

to support her more easily, she said in faintest whisper, ‘ Will you give him a message for me when I am gone, and it can do no harm ? ’

‘ *Exactly, that I will, pretty love ! —don’t hurry yourself— I shall understand—don’t distress yourself now.* ’

Isabel drew from under her pillow a little case of cardboard, and pushing its lid open, she showed a China rose-bud, brown and naked, and short-stalked, with only one or two dead crisp leaflets left on the stem ; and then, placing it in Mrs. Rennie’s hand, she said, ‘ Give it him—*afterwards* ; and tell him that though it and I are faded quite —’

‘ Well, my dear ? ’—for Isabel had stopped short—‘ the love I felt when he gave it me has never got paler or weaker, and——”

‘ You *must* not talk more ! Ah, yes, I see the date—in September, the year before last.’

‘ Yes, and he threw it away ; he did not know I kept it—all the time.’

She lay in Mrs. Rennie’s arms some few minutes, apparently lulled to deeper quiet, and then she said, ‘ I *think* you can make him happy.’

‘ God bless you, dear, for saying so ! I try. Would you like him to come up to see you again this evening ? ’

'No, not to-day. I *can't*; but beg him to let me see him to-morrow. I'm *so* tired!'

* * * * *

On the morrow he saw her indeed, or rather the worn-out frame in which she had suffered and won eternal triumph. He saw the loving tenderness that still lay in the lines and hollows of her unmoving countenance; but what *she* saw he could only guess, for she had passed within the veil, and heard what 'jener alte Tod leis mit dir spricht.'* And both he and Maida lived on, with only the remembrance of what she *had been* distinct in their vainly yearning hearts.

It was never possible to either of them to speak together about her past: and when Peter referred to it in conversation with his sister, it was almost always with recrimination that he spoke. Those who take part in any fault of our committing, and seem to give it sanction at the time, are sure to judge it severely at last; all the more severely because of their own connivance at it. No human being's reproach could, however, affect Maida's peace after those pricks which she habitually endured from her own conscience. And yet, unlikely and paradoxical as it sounds, her peace was henceforward deeper

* That old Death says to thee low-voiced.—*L. Schefer.*

than it had ever been before. It is not possible for any spirit to humble itself utterly before God, without knowing experimentally that He dwells with the contrite heart and with those who tremble at His word.

Maida's life, after her brother's marriage with Caroline Veyse, was devoted to works of mercy. At Kaiserwerth, she is well known as one of the most useful women of its beneficent institution. She comes to England occasionally. Her last visit was solely for the purpose of attending as godmother at the christening of Peter's second child, a little girl, whom they named Isabel.

In Cyril's home she is always dearly welcomed, and she sees him happy—not after the fashion of his old ideas of happiness, but sensibly and usefully. More happy, she sometimes thinks, than *she* could ever have made him; for his wife never seems aware of his moody fits, and thus they pass off the sooner.

Her friends often regret Maida's self-imposed banishment, for she is more delightful than ever, meeting grey-haired older years in serene content; not with that peculiar jaunty elevation of spirits by which some excellent spinsters depress those of their companions—particularly the young,—acting and talking as if the idea of greater happiness being

found in married life was a mistake they had outlived ; but humbly accepting the privations of her heart as both deserved, and for her soul's health beneficial, she is at the same time remarkable for delicacy and successful perseverance in smoothing the fate of happier lovers. To her many a blushing girl opens her full heart, and at least finds solace from her sympathy ; while little dreaming that the grave eyes turned upon her now with such cheerful kindness, can still weep bitterly when, at each return to England, she visits the grave of her friend, and remembers what she did to lay her beauty low.

LONDON

PRINTED BY SPOTTISWOODE AND CO.

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